

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

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FLAUBERT

BY

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GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

CHAPTER I

HIS LIFE

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT was born at Rouen on the 12th December 1821.

His father, the son of a veterinary surgeon of Nogent-sur-Seine, after studying medicine in Paris, had settled down at Rouen, where he had become the highly esteemed and even celebrated Dr. Flaubert, surgeon-in-chief of the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital, where he lived.

His mother, Anne Justine Caroline Fleuriot, was born at Pont l'Évêque in Calvados, and was, through her mother, connected with the oldest families in Lower Normandy. Gustave Flaubert was therefore a Champenois through his father, and a Norman on his mother's side. Thus there is no special induction to be drawn from his descent concerning his disposition and the turn of his mind.

We notice, however, that his outward ap-

pearance was wholly that of a Norman. Tall, powerfully built, destined to become somewhat obese in his old age, he looked like a Viking, with his strong features, large nose, high forehead, prominent eyes and heavy moustache, and evidently took after his mother and her forefathers.

He was born in the Hôtel-Dieu at Rouen, and was brought up there until the age of eighteen, when he went to Paris to study law. He was educated with great freedom—a day-scholar at the Lycée, where he did not work very hard. He was, however, passionately fond of literature, and, at the age of eleven, acted, with some of his friends, plays of his own composition.

He experienced one youthful passion which seems to have been very vivid.

At the age of sixteen, at Trouville, he was struck with the beauty of a woman of twenty-eight, dark, with beautiful, deep-set eyes, luminous teeth, an amber skin, and magnificent black hair. Her husband was a financier and a petticoat-hunter. Flaubert admired the husband and worshipped the wife. He was received in the intimacy of the household, but never declared his love. Later, the lady lost

her reason. From this adventure Flaubert drew the *Éducation Sentimentale*, that of all his books which he preferred.

It is probable that this love preserved him from the shameful amusements of youth from which he appears to have abstained until the age of twenty-two, if we rightly interpret a line in one of his letters.

The friends of his childhood and youth were not numerous. They were apparently almost reduced to three—Ernest Chevalier, Louis Bouilhet, and Alfred le Poitevin, the dear *confidant* of his loftiest thoughts, whom he lost at an early age, in 1848. Maxime du Camp was a later friend, first met in Paris about 1842.

Flaubert was charming at the age of eighteen in his vigorous and somewhat shy grace. A woman who knew him at that time wrote forty years later: ‘Gustave Flaubert at that time looked like a young Greek. He was tall, slender, graceful and supple like an athlete, unconscious of his mental and physical gifts, careless of the impression he produced, and entirely indifferent to conventionality. His costume was composed of a red flannel shirt, trousers of thick dark blue cloth, a scarf of

the same colour tightly bound round his waist, and a hat worn anyhow and often dispensed with. When I spoke to him of influence or of celebrity as of desirable or estimable things, he listened, smiling, and apparently supremely indifferent. He admired what was beautiful in Nature, Art, and Literature, and said he would live for that without a personal thought. He never dreamed of glory or of profit. His great joy was to find anything which seemed to him worthy to be admired. The charm of his society lay in his enthusiasm for all that was noble, and the charm of his mind consisted in an intense individuality. What his nature lacked was interest in useful outside things. If he heard people say that religion, politics, or business were as interesting as literature or art, he opened his eyes in pity and astonishment. . . .’ Such was young Flaubert when he came to Paris in 1840 to study law, as he would have studied anything else, and without more taste for it than for medicine or pharmacy. He was bored in Paris, he hated what is called ‘a student’s life,’ and had not yet made very definite literary plans. He lived in the Rue de l’Est, in a small and uncomfortable bachelor flat. He used to spend whole days alone,

opening a law-book soon to close it again, and lying on his bed for hours, smoking and dreaming. He was becoming moody.

He occasionally went to Pradier's studio, where he one day met Victor Hugo, and where he made the acquaintance of Madame Louise Colet, a literary woman who was very well known at that time—too well, perhaps. He was also seen at the houses of Maurice Schlesinger, the publisher, and of Dr. Cloquet, a friend of his father's. In September and October 1840, he travelled with the latter in the Pyrenees and in Corsica. The journey was a wholesome change and made a deep impression on him. The descriptions of Corsican scenery in his letters already betray the master painter that he was to become. 'I can now talk to you of Corsica with some knowledge, since I have seen the greater part of the western coast. The whole country is covered with mountains, and the roads are all up and down, so that one goes through deep gorges and through the *maquis*. Suddenly the scenery changes like a theatre-scene and another horizon appears. • The road on which we were went along the sea-front, and we were walking in sand; there was a sun such as

you have never seen lighting up the whole coast and giving it a white vapoury tint. The rocks emerging from the surface of the water shone like diamonds, and, to our left, the myrtle-bushes filled the air with scent.'

After a few short holidays of that kind, or others shorter still and spent at Rouen, he used to return to his student's room, working now and then for some pressing examination, more often bored to death, laughing nevertheless at his own mediocre existence, and occasionally writing a comic sketch in which we can perceive the future painter of Homais and of Bournisien :

DIALOGUE

(*I. My doorkeeper, an old woman. I hear some noise.*)

The Doorkeeper (in the hall). It's me, monsieur; don't let me disturb you. I am bringing you some matches, monsieur; monsieur wanted some.

I. Yes.

The Doorkeeper. Monsieur burns a lot. Monsieur works a great deal. Ah! how Monsieur does work! I could not work like that!

I. Yes.

The Doorkeeper. Monsieur is going home soon ? Monsieur will do well.

I. Yes. .

The Doorkeeper. It will do you good to have some air, for since you have been here, surely, surely . . .

I. Yes.

The Doorkeeper (louder). Your parents must be glad to have a son like you ! (That is her one idea ; she has already said it to Hamard.)

I. Yes.

In 1845 he lost his father, and in 1846 his sister Caroline whom he adored. His mother now being very lonely, he gladly decided to give up Paris which he disliked, and the law which he detested, in order to live at Croisset, near Rouen, in a pleasant and even picturesque family seat from which one could see the Seine, boats going up or down the river, and beyond, on the further bank, thickly wooded hills.

He lived there for thirty-four years, until his death, a laborious and studious life, only interrupted by a journey to Brittany with Maxime du Camp (1846), a journey in the

East with the same (1849), and some visits to Paris at irregular intervals.

It was in 1846 that he took up literature seriously, reading much, taking notes, making commentaries on his reading in his letters to his friends, making plans for future work, and even beginning to write, for, according to the recollections of his niece, Mme. Commanville, the first MS. of the *Saint-Antoine* is dated 1846.

His love-affair with Mme. Louise Colet also began in that year. The first letter from Flaubert to that lady in which any intimate allusions are made is dated the 4th August 1846. Their intimacy, with the quarrels, re-criminations, reconciliations, and fresh ruptures which are usual in similar cases, lasted about eight years, from 1846 to the beginning of 1854. It may be considered as the only sentimental episode of any importance in Flaubert's life.

In 1849, he went with Maxime du Camp for the above-mentioned journey to the East. He saw Malta, Egypt (going up the Nile as far as Kenh), Syria, Palestine, Constantinople, Athens and a part of Greece. All enchanted him. All his life he dreamt to return to those

lands of colour and of ruins. The Pyramids especially and the great Sphinx intoxicated him with an ardent joy: 'We reached the bottom of the hill on which the Pyramids stand, a week ago, on Friday (7th December 1849), at four in the afternoon. The desert begins there. I could not resist it. I set my horse at full speed. Maxime did likewise, and we came to the foot of the Sphinx. At that sight, an indescribable one (it would take ten pages, and what pages!), my brain whirled and my companion's face turned as white as the paper on which I write. At sunset, the Sphinx and the three Pyramids, all rosy, seemed drowned in light; the old monster gazed at us, terrifying and motionless. Never shall I forget that wonderful impression. We spent three nights lying at the foot of those old Pyramids, and, frankly, it is marvellous. The more you look at them the bigger they seem; the stones which seem like street cobbles, seen at twenty paces, are really about the size of a man, and, if you climb them, they grow higher and higher, as when one climbs a mountain. . . .'

After the year 1850, incidents in Flaubert's life were almost exclusively episodes in his

literary life, and his history becomes that of his books.

He lived at Croisset more than three-quarters of the year, working furiously, and only allowing himself the briefest holidays. He loved the silent old house—its long, low, white form in the green garden lighted up by the reflections of the wide river which stretched before it. It was vaguely historical, besides, having belonged to the monks of Saint-Ouen, and Flaubert liked to think that the Abbé Prévôt had written *Manon Lescaut* there. There were still a few pointed roofs and seventeenth century sash-windows in the inner yard. His study, on the first floor, had five windows, of which three looked out on the garden and two on the Seine.

He usually rose at ten o'clock, read his letters and papers, and ate a light breakfast at eleven. Then he would walk on the terrace which overlooked the river, sit in a small Louis xv. pavilion at the end of the path, gaze with pleasure at the familiar landscape, and listen to the sound of that chain which was used for the towing of boats, and which he often mentions in his correspondence. He generally came in again about one o'clock, and

worked the whole afternoon; after which he dined about seven, a little more copiously than he had breakfasted.. He then allowed himself another walk in the garden before declaring that 'it was time to return to the *Bovary*' or to any other task, and sitting down to another bout of work which usually lasted until the small hours of the night.¹

Sometimes he went to Rouen for the day on business. When he came to Paris he entertained Sainte-Beuve, M. and Mme. Sandeau, M. and Mme. Cornu, Jules Duplan, Charles d'Osmoy, Théophile Gautier, etc., in his small *pied-à-terre* in the Boulevard du Temple; towards the end of his life the brothers Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, and Émile Zola also came. They held great discussions on literature and art; Flaubert's thundering voice was heard and the 'infamous *bourgeois*' greatly suffered. During those visits to Paris he frequented the 'Magny dinner,'² which was a sort of club-meeting, almost an institution. There he met Sainte-Beuve, Gautier, the two Goncourts, Gavarni, Renan, Taine, the Marquis de Chennevières, Louis Bouilhet, and

¹ Mme. Commanville, *Souvenirs*.

² A restaurant in the Rue Mazet which has now ceased to exist.

sometimes George Sand. But the only events in his life were the conception, elaboration, and publication of his books. .

From 1850 to 1856 Flaubert was busy planning out and preparing *Madame Bovary*. This novel appeared in the *Revue de Paris*¹ from the 1st October 1856 to the 15th December in the same year. In January and February 1857 he defended the police-court action which the Government had brought against the publishers of the *Revue de Paris* and against himself on account of that novel, which was considered immoral; he was very strongly attacked by the *procureur impérial*, M. Ernest Pinard, defended with great warmth and eloquence by Maître Sénard, and acquitted. Although the judge made some severe remarks as to the morality of the work, the judgment concluded with these words: '*It does not appear that this book was, like certain others, written for the sole purpose of satisfying the sensual passions and the spirit of debauchery and licence,*

¹ A *Revue de Paris* had been founded in 1829 by Dr. Véron and edited in turns by Amédée Pichot, Philarète Chasles, and François Buloz. It disappeared in 1845. A second *Revue de Paris* lived from 1851 to 1858 under the direction of Théophile Gautier, Arsène Houssaye, and Maxime du Camp. It published *Madame Bovary* and Balzac's *Paysans*. It was suppressed on the morrow of the Orsini attempt on account of its liberal tendencies.

or with the intention of turning into ridicule things which should be surrounded by general respect.'

Between 1857 and 1861, Flaubert worked simultaneously at *Salammbô* and the *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*. *Salammbô* appeared in 1862, after some strenuous archæological researches and an immense literary effort.

From 1862 until 1869, he returned to the study of modern manners and customs, recalling youthful memories at the same time that he became interested in political questions, as was natural to a man of forty-five. The result was *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, which he produced in 1869.

After 1870, his natural tendency to melancholia was deepened by political events, advancing age, the lack of success (compared with that of his first work) of *Salammbô* and of *L'Éducation*, together with a painful nervous disease characterised by sudden attacks which constituted a perpetual menace. He had long ago lost his sister and his friend, almost brother, Le Poitevin; he lost the friendship of Maxime du Camp, whom he had insulted without much reason. He lost his friend Louis Bouilhet in 1871, his mother in 1872; he very nobly sacrificed part of his fortune to some poorer

relations. He was now growing old and very lonely. His only consolations were the attentive devotion of his niece, Mme. Commanville, and the touching friendship he had formed with George Sand, who, in her old age, proved the sweetest comforter of the afflicted. She supported him, consoled him, and even amused him so far as she could. She succeeded in luring him, though too rarely, to Nohant. She constantly wrote to him adorable, sisterly letters.

Flaubert also found some comfort in the budding talent of Guy de Maupassant, whose mother had been a playfellow of his childhood, and whom he adopted as a disciple. He taught him the art of producing, with great difficulty, apparently easy and natural work, and rightly foresaw in him a glorious successor.

Moreover, he was working harder than ever. In 1874, he produced in its final form that *Tentation de Saint-Antoine* which had haunted him during his whole life, and which might be called *Flaubert's Temptation*. In March 1874 he produced a melancholy comedy called *Le Candidat*, which was a failure, and published in 1877 *Trois Contes* in one volume, which was not very successful, only one of the three short

stories, *Un Cœur Simple*, being calculated to touch the heart of his readers. He also studied every possible subject, the most varied as well as the most painful, in order to write *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the one of all his works which he preferred, after, perhaps even before, *L'Éducation Sentimentale*. Worn out by an effort quite out of proportion to the result and perhaps to the design of that last work, he died leaving it unfinished; it was to have been in two volumes, and he only left material for one.

‘Weary to the marrow,’ he expired in a few minutes after an apoplectic stroke, on the morning of the 8th May 1880, at the age of fifty-eight years and four months. His funeral took place on Tuesday, the 11th May. After the religious service in the church of Canteleu, a parish which included the Croisset domain, the funeral procession went on to Rouen, to the Cimetière Monumental, where Flaubert was interred in the family vault. He was not a member of the Académie Française. No speeches were uttered on his tomb, according to his own desire, but only a few words of farewell by M. Lapierre, an intimate friend of the family and the editor of the *Nouvelliste de Rouen*. A monument in high relief, composed

of a portrait medallion with an allegory, an admirable work by Chapu, was erected to the memory of Flaubert in the Jardin Solférino, against the façade of the Rouen Museum, on Sunday, the 23rd November 1890.¹

¹ These dates and details were kindly given me by the Mayor of Rouen (3rd May 1899).

The monument of the Rouen Museum is reproduced on the frontispiece of the present volume.

CHAPTER II

HIS CHARACTER AND DISPOSITION

FLAUBERT was born a shy and a proud man, and it is possible, without straining facts, to explain the whole of his moral character by those two essential traits; there is nothing in his character that does not present a mixture of those two elements. A proud man who is shy is twice proud, and a shy man who is proud is twice shy. Flaubert was both to an almost morbid degree. Standing before the ruins of the Tuileries in 1871, he allowed himself to say, 'And that would not have happened if they had understood *L'Éducation Sentimentale*.' In discussion, he admitted of no contradiction, and his friends avoided gain-saying him, knowing how dangerous for him were the fits of passion into which he threw himself when they forgot to agree with him. He had an easy contempt for every thing that differed from himself. No one looked down more completely upon the whole literature of

the nineteenth century ; as to that which was not literature properly speaking, he considered that it was beneath contempt and not worth the trouble of despising it. He was one of those who take a natural taste for what they are capable of doing for a reasoned conviction, and who calmly despise all that they cannot reach, unconsciously applying this private axiom, ' It is not interesting to me, and therefore worthless.' Seldom was there an *ego* more exclusive, more uncompromising than that of Flaubert.

With it all, he was shy, almost timid, afraid to let himself go when his self-love prompted him to do so. He did not like demonstrative or confidential conversation, and even disliked being questioned, though naturally talkative and inclined to monopolise the conversation. He wrote to a woman : ' For more than twenty years I used to get as red as a carrot when people said to me, " Are you not a writer ? " You may judge of my timidity when other feelings are involved. . . . I do not like my feelings to be known of the public, and my passions thrown up in my face in the course of conversation. . . . I feel that I should love you more ardently if no one knew that I loved

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you. . . .' In other words, he was in love, and blushed at his weakness as a child would blush who was caught disobeying. He suffered in his love itself from the knowledge that his love was known. It was with a somewhat similar feeling that Benjamin Constant drew down the blinds of his carriage as he arrived in Paris on his way back from Coppet.¹

That mixture of timidity and conceit made of Flaubert one of those men who are always anxious to talk about themselves, though feeling uncomfortable whilst doing so, and who delight in hearing themselves talked about, though it causes them great uneasiness and disquiet. They soon become sensitive and very easy to offend, and this was the case with Flaubert. I have already said, reading between the lines of his correspondence, that he remained chaste, though passionately in love, until the age of twenty-two. Frédéric Moreau of the *Éducation Sentimentale*, represents himself, somewhat modified and softened, without Flaubert's outbursts of temper.

In fact, his irritability, when people attempted to guide him in all kindness, was strange and excessive. Du Camp having

¹ The residence of Mme. de Staël.—TRANS.

written to him that there was a good place to be taken and that he should hasten to publish his first work, we cannot but be surprised to read his answer: 'You seem to have a mania concerning me, a redhibitory^f vice. It does not bore me, you need not fear, for I have long ago made up my mind on the subject. I merely tell you that all these words: *to hasten, the right moment, a place to be taken, to affirm oneself* . . . are to me a meaningless vocabulary. . . .' Our surprise increases when, Du Camp having thought that letter unkind, Flaubert emphasises it by replying: 'But then why do you go on with your sing-song? I look upon your mania concerning me as a comical one, that is all. Do I blame you for living in Paris, and for publishing your stuff? If your conscience ordered you to give me advice you did well, and I thank you for your kind intention. But I fancy that you extend your conscience to others, and that the good Louis and the excellent Theo, whom you associate with your desire to make me a little wig to hide my baldness, care very little about my doings. . . . Try to do likewise. ' . . . We are no longer on the same road, we do not sail in the same boat. May God lead each of us where he wants to

go. I do not seek a harbour but the high seas. If I am shipwrecked you need not trouble to go into mourning.'

All that is scarcely polite ; but if it is offensive, it is so because Flaubert had been offended. They had treated him like an ordinary man of letters ; his character as an exceptional being had not been respected. His wrath was deep and lasting ; he wrote to her who was at that time his ordinary *confidante* : ' Du Camp has written me a *kind* and sorrowful letter ; I have sent him another from the same cask of vinegar (as the first one). I think he will for some time feel giddy from the blow, and that he will leave me alone. I am very good-natured up to a certain point, up to the frontiers of my liberty which are not to be overstepped. Now as he wished to trespass on my most private territory, I have sent him back to his corner, a long way off. As he told me that we owed something to others, that we should help each other, I expressed to him my complete indifference to all and to everything, and I added : " Others will do without my lights, and all I ask in return is that they should not asphyxiate me with their candles " . . . and so on ; four pages of it. I am a Barbarian, I have

a Barbarian's muscular apathy, nervous languor, green eyes and tall stature. But I also have a Barbarian's impulses, obstinacy and irascibility. . . .'

What a display of temper for a well-meant though perhaps insufficiently respectful proceeding! His loves were like his friendships, at once timid and brutal. Nothing was to be demanded of him; he must be welcomed when he offered himself or else he revolted suddenly, with overpowering violence. The woman whom he loved, and who speaks, a forsaken Ariadne, of his 'monstrous egotism, constantly increasing in solitude,' need perhaps not be blindly believed, but her description of him as 'the being who in his *proud hardness* exercised over me an irresistible domination' is certainly a good one.

We may guess from all this how deeply sensitive he was to the critiques on his writings. They exasperated him. He wrote of Sainte-Beuve's famous article on *Madame Bovary*: 'Sainte-Beuve's article was quite good for the *bourgeois*. I am told that it produced a great effect in Rouen.' Yet Sainte-Beuve's article was full of praise. As to the others, '. . . that of the *Chronique* is innocent, I

think, but that of the *Courrier franco-italien* is fundamentally malicious, and I do not care a rap. I cannot think how one can be shocked by a newspaper article. No doubt it is an excess of pride on my part, but I assure you that I feel no sort of hatred against M. Claveau. The unhappy wretch thinks I do not trouble about style ! ’

His pride, his timidity and sensitiveness made of Flaubert a shy, lonely, grumpy misanthrope. He shut himself up in his hermitage at Croisset, professing for humanity a contempt which was not quite disdain, and which was far from being indifference. He confined himself in a sort of sullen sorrow, allowing but very few friends to come to share it with him and never allowing a woman to disturb his solitude, however earnestly he might be implored to do so, and perhaps because of the very indiscretion of the request. His whole attitude meant *Noli me tangere*, and his speech or his pen expressed it occasionally : ‘ I shrink within myself so deeply as to disappear completely, and any attempt to draw me out hurts me. On our way to La Roche Guyon, I was feeling like that, and your voice as you called me every moment, and especially your touch

on my shoulder to solicit my attention, caused me real pain. It was through sheer self-restraint that I did not snub you in the most brutal fashion ! ’

He was already thus in his youth, or rather, and this is a characteristic trait, he already foresaw in his youth that he would be thus all his life. At eighteen he wrote : ‘ Do not believe me to be undecided in my choice of a profession ; I shall certainly choose none, for I despise men too much to wish to do them either good or harm.’ And at twenty-five : ‘ The weather is grey, the river is yellow, and the grass is green ; the trees hardly show any leaves ; they are just beginning ; it is the spring, the season of joy and of love. But there is no spring in my heart any more than on the high-road where the glare wearies the eyes—— Do you remember where that is ? It is in *Novembre*. I was nineteen when I wrote it. It will soon be six years ago. It is strange that I should have been born with so little faith in happiness. When quite young I had a complete presentiment of life. It was like a nauseous kitchen smell coming up through a grating ; before you have touched the food you realise that it will make you sick. . . .’ Again at thirty-

two he wrote : ' From day to day I feel an increasing distaste towards my fellow-creatures developing in my heart, and I am glad of it. . . . ' And again : ' Why does the discovery of some misdeed always provoke mirth on my part ? ' ' I like to see humanity and everything that men respect belittled, mocked, hated and hissed, and that is why I have some respect for ascetics. . . . '

The sequence of his sentiments is obvious. Sensitiveness begets temper, temper sorrow, sorrow misanthropy, and misanthropy maliciousness. Hence the last touch which became with him a monomania : a simultaneous hatred and love of stupidity and a simultaneous hatred and love of the *bourgeois*. His hatred of stupidity led him into a passionate search for it in order to loathe it, and into an amorous contemplation of it in order to abhor it the more. His hatred of the *bourgeois* became an infinite pleasure in observing him, studying him, penetrating him to the core in order to taste the wicked pleasure of appreciating his stupidity. At the early age of seventeen, in the Pyrenees, in the inn by the lake of Gaube, he noted in his pocket-book the silly remarks written by other travellers. ' Stupidity gets

into my pores,' he said. And he wrote : ' The sad grotesque has infinite charm for me ; it responds to the hidden desires of my nature, which is that of a bitter buffoon. It does not make me laugh, but sets me dreaming. I see it wherever it is to be found, and I find it in myself. That is why I love analysing ; it is a study which pleases me. . . .' No one better understood Gresset's saying : ' Fools are here on earth for our amusement.' But it is obvious that he would have modified that saying. He would have said : ' Fools are here on earth for our deepest and most intense pleasure. They are venerable and worthy of eternal gratitude because they so complacently give us cause to despise them royally. They are the candid and spontaneous buffoons of the kings of wit and of misanthropical philosophers. They are here below for the sombre delight of melancholy hearts.'

Thus Flaubert became a sort of literary monk (note above his remark about ascetics) —a confined, morose, solitary monk, looking upon humanity with horror, disgust, irony and sarcasm, mocking it with a bitter laugh sadder than any tears, and regarding it with

what is called pity, but is really a merciless glance. ·

In that and in his whole character he very much resembled Stendhal. There is in fact no difference between them, save that Stendhal was more superficial. But, without mentioning the same absence in both of critical sense, a subject outside that which concerns us for the moment, we find the same timidity, the same pride, the same contempt, real and affected, for men in general and for contemporary literature; the same habit of sarcasm, the same horror of the *bourgeois*, that is of 'the being who has a low manner of feeling,' or rather of the man who neither thinks nor feels in an eccentric fashion; also the same affectation of libertine tastes, stronger and more constant in the elder than in the younger, and the same disagreeable, contradictory disposition. Stendhal, however, being less serious, was more sociable. What in him was merely an often repeated sally became in the other a deep feeling, which he pondered over in solitude and which became an essential part of his being. For a long time, Stendhal, a misanthropist, loved to display his misanthropy in society, and often expressed it in witty say-

ings. Flaubert, a greater misanthropist, sat alone with his misanthropy, and enjoyed interminable *tête-à-têtes* with it.

A literary monk, a lonely recluse, he spent almost the whole of a fairly long life repeating to himself that Man is little and Art great, just as a religious hermit would say to himself that God is great and Man is little, despising the one and serving the other with an equal fervour and an equally intractable devotion.

CHAPTER III

HIS IDEAS AND THE TURN OF HIS MIND

It is sufficiently known that Flaubert was at one and the same time a Romanticist and a Realist, as if, coming into literary life in the middle of the nineteenth century, he had wished to present in himself an epitome of the forty years which preceded him and of the forty years which were to follow. It may be interesting to inquire how such a complex intellectual state and unique turn of mind became gradually formed and developed until it became Flaubert's very spirit, the basis of his intellectual life.

From his childhood, we find him curious of strong, even violent sensations. Brought up in a hospital, he and a little playmate climbed walls in order to look at corpses in the theatre. As a boy, he fancied that lunatics and idiots were attracted to him; he has repeatedly stated this as a fact, though it proves nothing save that he himself had a leaning

towards mystery, especially of a lugubrious kind. The East had an everlasting fascination for him ; he dreamt of it, saw it, dreamt of it more than ever, and always felt tempted to return to it, and saddened that he could not live in it. ‘ Dear old fellow, when shall we lie again on the sands of Alexandria or sleep in the shade of the plane-trees by the Hellespont ? ’ (1845). ‘ I carry within me the melancholy of barbaric races, their migratory instincts and the innate disgust of life which made them forsake their country as they would have forsaken their very selves. They loved the sunshine, all those Barbarians who came to Italy to die ; they felt a frenzied yearning towards light, the blue sky, a warm existence ; they dreamt of happy days full of love, juicy to their hearts like the ripe grape that is pressed in the hand. . . . ’ (1846). ‘ To think that I shall never see China, that I shall never be rocked to sleep by the rhythmical step of a camel, that I shall never see the shining eyes of a tiger crouching in a bamboo forest ! You may look upon all this as a sensual appetite, undeserving of pity ; but I suffer so much when I think of it, which unfortunately happens very often, that you would be moved with compassion if you

could see how lamentable, how irrevocable it is.' And so forth; and the intoxication of colour was as strong in his dreams as when he saw it in reality and was able to absorb it with delight.

Again, the taste for sadness is very strong in him. He finds in it charms which he likes to analyse in order to taste them more minutely. 'I have never seen a child without remembering that he would become an old man, or a cradle without thinking of a tomb. The contemplation of a woman brings her skeleton to my mind. That is why a merry sight makes me sad, and a sad spectacle does not affect me much.' A taste for sadness and mystery, for the lugubrious and the gruesome, for exotism, for the East and for dazzling light—such are indeed the elements which make up the soul of a Romanticist. In fact they constitute the whole of Romanticism, its basis excepted.

The basis of Romanticism is a horror of Realism and an ardent desire to escape from it. Romanticism is essentially romantic; it does away with Observation, which means submission to the real object, and with Reason, which merely starts from reality and then

patiently deduces clear ideas still resembling reality in that they are clear, and showing in the concatenation given them by Reason something of the monotony of real things. Romanticism dispenses with^o Wit, which is nothing but refined and rapid Reason, and often nothing but quick and ingenious Observation, and also with Good Sense, which is the same thing, without refinement and without promptitude. To free oneself from the real by means of imagination, and also by retiring into the lonely sanctuary of personal sensitiveness—here lies the real basis of Romanticism for all time; and that is why, as soon as Romanticism loses its influence on the public mind, the form that reaction takes is always Realism.

Now Flaubert had in his soul the whole of Romanticism, save its basis. He loved the play of imagination—all that was strange, mysterious and gruesome, vivid colours and dazzling light. He loved rhetoric, and his letters, either as a lover or as a friend, are full of it; he loved rhythm, the well-balanced periods of a harmonious style, and revelled in the melodious phrases written by Chateaubriand and by himself. But he had no horror

at all of the real; on the contrary, he had a taste for it. Already at seventeen he was taking notes on the passing *bourgeois*. Even earlier we find, inscribed in his childish correspondence, notes on his teachers, his school-fellows, all his small world. He was a born observer. He acted plays with his little friends, and the *dramatis personæ* of that childish theatre were often to be found among the inhabitants of Rouen. He was a sort of 'Bazochien' at fourteen. His first literary projects were Romanticist: the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, a mystery-play, *Frédégonde*, etc.; but his first book was an absolutely realistic one, in which we detect the note-book carefully furnished with the observation of years.

His literary admirations point very clearly to this dualism in his tendencies, his tastes, and even his temperament. He likes Homer, Æschylus, Plautus, Shakespeare, Byron, Victor Hugo, Chateaubriand, Rabelais, and, perhaps above all, Goethe's *Faust*. But he also adored Régnier, La Bruyère, Le Sage, and Voltaire, whose *Candide* remained for him an everlasting joy. Thus he cherished on one side men of great imagination, and on the other men of precise and incisive observation. Between

those two groups stand men of a well-regulated, serene and somewhat cold imagination, and also men who are especially witty; and those are the objects of his dislike. He thought nothing of Sophocles, Horace, Racine, Lamartine, or Sainte-Beuve. 'I am flattered that you should unite with me in my hatred for Sainte-Beuve and all his crew. Above everything, I like a wiry, substantial, lucid pen, with salient muscles and tanned skin; I like manly phrases, not feminine ones, such as Lamartine writes very often. . . .'

He disliked intelligent men, authors whose chief merit lay in ideas; he was incredibly limited in that direction. '*À propos* of Proudhon, dear master, I beg that you will read a love-story, called, I think, *Marie et Maxime*. That has to be known in order to give an idea of the style of our *thinkers*. It can be placed in parallel with the *Voyage en Bretagne* of the great Veuillot in *Çà et là*.'

'Do not read *La Politique tirée de l'Écriture Sainte*. The eagle of Meaux certainly seems to me to be a goose.'

'Let us howl against Thiers! Is it possible to see a more triumphant imbecile, a more abject lump . . .? No, nothing can give an

idea of the nausea with which I regard that old diplomatic melon seated in rotund stupidity on the *bourgeois* dunghill. Is it possible to treat philosophy, religion, nations, liberty, the past, the future, history and Nature with more idiotic, more inept familiarity! He seems to me as eternal as mediocrity.'

'I read in Jerusalem a Socialistic book, *Essai de philosophie positive*, by Auguste Comte. It is so stupid as to be boring. It contains mines of immense comicality, Californias of grotesque. . . .'

It is evident that the realm of ideas is absolutely closed to him, and that an intelligent man seems to him an abnormal being, something like a malefactor.

His *Correspondance*, which is so interesting in other ways, is but too instructive on that point. He constantly refers to literature, and does not express a single general idea, save that literature should be impersonal; this is a feeling with him and derives from a feeling; he does not set it forth as a doctrine, but affirms it energetically. Flaubert entirely lacked the critical sense and did not like it in others; in fact it was sufficient to possess it in order to incur his displeasure.

Thus we return to the same position : men of imagination on the right hand, 'of observation on the left ; he likes no others. Writers of intelligence, reason, wit, grace, and charm either escape or hurt him ; he either turns away from them or abuses them.

He went through a phase of metaphysics and mystical philosophy at the age of eighteen under the influence of Le Poitevin, and when he read Balzac's *Louis Lambert* he recognised his former dreams, ideas, projects, and even phrases. He did think of writing 'a metaphysical novel with apparitions.' But it was merely the mysterious and fearful element which interested him. 'That devil of a book set me dreaming all night about Alfred (Le Poitevin). . . . How near one sometimes feels to madness, I especially. You know my influence on madmen, and how they love me ! I assure you I am getting frightened. . . . Curse the book ! it hurts me. How I do feel it ! . . . I shall make use of all this (his nervous disease) by introducing it into a book, that metaphysical novel with apparitions of which I spoke to you ; but as I am *frightened of the subject* from the health point of view, I must wait. . . .'

So his moments of philosophy were but a

peculiar form of his romanticism, of his morbid, anxious taste for the fantastic, the mysterious, the fearful. He liked to see with precision, clearness, relief, and exact minuteness; and he loved to imagine vast, immense, colossal, alarming, even monstrous things. Thus his mind was divided between the need of reality and the needs of an imagination let loose and powerfully prolific.

Thus developed and grew that singular realistic Romanticist who was Flaubert. Which was the real man? the Romanticist or the Realist? Truly I do not know; does one ever know, in a complex nature, what constitutes its real basis? Divers tendencies either strive with each other, neutralise each other, succeed in combining harmoniously, or else give way to each other in turn.

My own intuition is that in Flaubert the real man was the Romanticist. That is the dominant feature in his correspondence when he lets himself go; he seems to return to it with pleasure and from preference. Among his favourite authors, he really prefers those who are ruled by imagination. When he writes a realistic book, he expresses the disgust he feels with more energy than when writing a romantic

book. And whilst writing the realistic book he dreams of the romantic book he will write next with more pleasure than he anticipates from a realistic work whilst engaged in a romantic one. Indeed, he is at heart a Romanticist. He dreamt of Chateaubriand's glory far more than of that of Le Sage, though he loves them both, making no mistake as to his own nature; still it is very evident that *Les Martyrs* are more to him than *Gil Blas*.

In any case, if these two inclinations were not equally strong in him, they both were very imperious. They kept up an even balance, so to speak, in his literary career. Invariably, a romantic work comes after a realistic one and *vice versa*. *Salammbô* comes after *Madame Bovary*, *L'Éducation Sentimentale* after *Salammbô*, *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* after *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, and *Bouvard et Pécuchet* after *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*. The alternate succession is constant and by no means fortuitous. In his correspondence he likes to talk of the novel he will write next as much as and more than of that which he is writing at the time; and he always proposes to write an entirely different kind of book when he has finished the work he is doing. An

attack of Romanticism inspires him with an invincible desire for a realistic bout and alternately. Having satisfied his imagination, even before having done so, he feels a renewed and ardent need of the real; having responded to this need, even before having done so, imagination calls for her share and receives an ardent promise that it will come. We have here two inward tyrants pulling in opposite directions.

That is to be seen in everything he does and everything he reads. He exclaims of *Le Rouge et le Noir*: 'I find it badly written and incomprehensible as to characters and intentions . . . it is that good Sainte-Beuve who has made it the fashion. People fall into raptures before a talent whose only recommendation is to be obscure. I have never understood Balzac's enthusiasm for a writer of that sort.' A somewhat foolish judgment, no doubt, but I am chiefly struck with this: Flaubert, faced with a realistic work, is specially shocked by the want of style, 'badly written . . . a writer of that sort. . . .' He cannot read five hundred pages of moral observations written in cold, colourless style. The indignation of Flaubert the Romanticist becomes aroused as

also was that of Victor Hugo against the same book and for the same reasons. And that closes his eyes to the marvellous psychological observation.

Inversely, when reading *Les Misérables* he exclaims : ‘ *Les Misérables* exasperates me, and one is not allowed to speak against it for fear of being taken for a Government spy. . . . I, who have worshipped him all my life long, I am now indignant. I must burst out. . . . I find in that book no truth and no grandeur. As to the style, it seems to be intentionally incorrect and low. It is a means of flattering the populace. . . . And the characters are all in one piece, as in tragedies. Where are there any prostitutes like Fantine, any convicts like Valjean, or any political men like the stupid Johnnies of the A.B.C. ? . . . They are all dummies, sugar-dolls, to begin with Mgr. Bienvenu. . . .’

He is not altogether wrong, but his anger is especially that of a Realist faced with a Romanticist work, and who is prevented by his desire for realities from enjoying the sort of pleasure which the work is intended to give. Who would think of seeking for psychological truth in Victor Hugo’s writing ? But Flaubert needs

it, and the absence of it closes his eyes to the epic beauty of the work, and even goes so far as to make him think the style of it low and incorrect, which is indeed somewhat strange. The Realist in him prevents the Romanticist from being moved to admiration or even to pleasure.

And that helps one to understand why Flaubert's critical sense is so doubtful, so confused, and, let us say the word, so obtuse. There always is in him—besides his pride when a contemporary writer is concerned, and no author ever was more jealous than Flaubert—there always is in him something which prevents him from letting himself go : his realism when criticising a romanticist work, his romanticism when criticising a realistic work, and sometimes, perhaps always, the conflict between those two tendencies.

Only one literary idea has been permanent in his mind, and not only permanent but very sufficiently clear and strong, because, as I have said, it was a feeling which had become an idea. He has affirmed again and again that literature ought to be 'impersonal,' that is to say, that an author should never appear in his work ; never confide his feelings, his ideas, his

convictions ; never speak as man to man ; never, even indirectly, allow his ideas or the state of his mind to be understood or suspected through his writing.

It is well known that, towards the end of his life, in his correspondence with George Sand, he repeated that idea a hundred times, returning to it again and again in different words ; but it must be noted that he held that opinion all his life. He wrote in 1852 : ‘ *Bovary* is an unheard-of feat, of which I alone am conscious : the subject, the characters, the effects, etc., etc., all is *outside myself*. . . . I think that that is as it should be. What you write is not for yourself, but for others ; Art has nothing to do with the artist. If he does not like red, green, or yellow, all the worse for him. All colours are beautiful. They have to be painted.’ Again in 1852 he writes : ‘ You will look with pity upon the custom of celebrating one’s own self. It may succeed once, in a shout ; but whatever may have been the lyricism of Byron, for instance, see how crushed it is by the superhuman impersonality of Shakespeare ! Do we even know whether he was merry or sad ? *The artist must manage so as to lead posterity to think that he never lived*

at all. The less I can form an idea of him the greater he seems to me. I can imagine nothing as to the person of Homer or of Rabelais, and, when I think of Michael-Angelo, I see the back view only of an old man of colossal stature working at his sculpture by night with torch-light.' He writes in the same strain in 1854: 'Personal sentimentality will later on cause a great deal of contemporary literature to be considered as puerile and rather silly. What feelings! what tenderness! what tears! There never were so many good souls. Phrases should hold blood, not lymph. . . . The fable of *Les Deux Pigeons* has always touched me more than the whole of Lamartine; but if La Fontaine had begun by spending his loving faculty in an exposition of his personal feelings, would he have had enough left to paint the love of two birds? . . .'

That idea is dear to Flaubert, first because it is a feeling in him and part of his character; then, because it is a Realist's idea; finally because nothing in his Romanticism is against it.

It is part of his character; it is a form of his shy pride, of his touchy sensitiveness. He likes to be let alone, he does not like to invite

interference. He keeps to himself; his door is not open to all-comers. *Noli me tangere*; therefore, do not let us invite contact. He is impersonal because he is *distant*. Personalism in literature seems to him a particular form of prostitution.

And that idea is a Realist's idea; the basis of realistic art is an effort towards impersonalism, towards 'submission to the object,' an attempt to be nothing but a clear-sighted and accurate painter. To feel things whilst looking at them leads to seeing them not as they are but as one would like to see them. Impassibility is a condition of realism. Since we must feel, let us at least act as if we did not, and, at any rate, do not let us show that we feel. Do not let us let loose our own feelings whilst describing those of others. Such an intervention on our part among our *dramatis personæ* would entirely change the character of our painting. The proportions would become confused and the perspective false; for it would happen sometimes that we should see things from afar, each in its place, forming a well-proportioned whole, and sometimes that we should throw ourselves into the midst of them, suddenly seeing some of them much too

closely. A realistic artist is therefore bound to be impersonal; he is a Realist because he is not ruled and tyrannised over by his own personality, and his art itself forces and accustoms him to suppress his own personality. Thus, in reading Le Sage we know nothing of him, save that he is a man who sees clearly and who writes well.

Lastly, his Romanticism and the manner in which he understood Romanticism in no wise prevented him from entertaining that idea. I have said that he was a Romanticist less the horror of the real and less the desire to escape reality. I have said that he was a Romanticist through imagination far more than through sensibility. Therefore, he neither felt the need to pour his feelings out in his books nor the necessity to feed his imagination by dreams and meditations in which personality reappears and even revels. His imagination merely required vast horizons, light, or gruesome and violent fictions, and in such a case, no doubt, it is necessary to create and not only to observe, but it is quite unnecessary to intervene in person and to send one's *ego* forth in one's writings.

Take this book of which he dreamt, a

‘metaphysical book with apparitions.’ It attracted Flaubert, because it was to be dark and powerful, and the author of the *Tentation* always entertained some apocalyptic project of that kind; but he gave it up because it would have been too personal, and he would have been forced to put Flaubert himself into the book, Flaubert in his most private being. He recoiled from it, partly from principle, and partly, as we have seen, from a sort of aversion.

Thus personal literature was naturally odious to him; his realistic tendencies confirmed him in his aversion, and his romantic tendencies were not of a nature to overcome or to attenuate his disgust. Hence that apparently singular phenomenon of a Romanticist who was a declared and even a furious enemy of personal literature whilst remaining a Romanticist, though Romanticism seems to be nothing but personal literature, and is often defined by itself and others in those words. For Romanticism certainly is that, but it is also something else, and it is the something else that Flaubert has made his own, leaving ‘that’ alone.

He conformed in this with the tendency of his time, moving with the 1850 group, but

more decisively. For the transition between the romanticist age and the realistic age consists precisely in this that, among the last comers in Romanticism, those who were not simple followers, preserved all the tastes of romanticists save the desire to escape the real and to flee from it. But that meant the preserving of Romanticism, all but its very soul. For indeed Gautier and Leconte de Lisle have but the outer envelope of Romanticism, its splendid, shining gleaming outside ; the kernel of it escapes them. Then the more powerful writers gradually began to feel the need of a basis, of a substance, and they found it in reality. And for some time, according to their taste or want of taste, they either invested realities with the colour, splendour and purple of Romanticism, the result being heterogeneous productions, or, more wisely, they sought realities again, but far away, in exotism or in antiquity, as being better able, on account of the distance, to carry the romanticist draperies and ornamentation ; Leconte de Lisle has often followed that device. Or else they made two portions : one for near realities, for realism, treating their real objects in the sober and precise form which was suitable to

them; and the other for distant realities, for the treatment of which they returned to the brilliant methods of the romanticist style. In this way, Flaubert made two distinct portions of his work and divided his resources accordingly.

Finally the time came when the substance carried the form away with it and dragged it down in its fall; then all aversion for the real disappeared, and with it the romanticist style itself; nothing remains but truly realistic works written in the plain straightforward style which is suitable to them.

To go back to Flaubert alone, his romanticist tendencies made of him a sort of Leconte de Lisle in prose, and his realistic tendencies a sort of Le Sage, more penetrating, more vigorous and more bitter. ‘*There are two distinct men within me*: one of them is in love with noise, with lyrism, with great eagle-flights, with all the sonorities of phraseology and all the high summits of ideas; the other searches and probes the reality as deeply as he can, loves to bring out small facts as well as great ones, and would like to make you feel almost materially the things which he reproduces. This one enjoys laughter and takes pleasure in

the animalism of mankind.' He obeyed his double nature, his inner life being too strong to let him sacrifice or repulse a single instinct. He firmly followed both paths, always attracted towards the one whilst following the other, always brought back to the first after walking for some time along the second. He never or hardly ever let them cross each other, however, being too much of an artist not to have a strong feeling of the unity of tone which is necessary to a work of art.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROMANTICIST : 'SALAMMBÔ'

Salammbô and *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* were, so to speak, the result of that Eastern dream which haunted Gustave Flaubert his whole life long. They contain and characterise the whole of Flaubert's romanticism. That romanticism consisted in the evocation of grandiose scenes in which documentation had a share, memories another, and dreams yet another, the greatest share. Some classic Eastern landscapes are to be found in his correspondence as early as 1851. 'I passed three times by Eleusis. By the gulf of Corinth, I thought with melancholy of the beings who once bathed their limbs and their hair in its blue waves. The harbour of Phaleron is shaped like a circus. Here the high-prowed galleys used to arrive, laden with wonderful things, vases and courtesans. Nature had given everything to those people—language, scenery, form and sunshine; the shape of the mountain itself

seems carved out and presents architectural lines such as are nowhere else to be seen. . . . It was a stroke of genius, choosing Delphi to place the Pythia there. It is a scene for religious terror : a narrow valley between two steep mountains, the bottom of it full of black olive trees, the mountains red and green, the whole teeming with precipices, with the sea at the back and a horizon of snow mountains. . . . The road from Megara to Corinth is incomparable : the path, cut out of the mountain, hardly broad enough for your horse to stand, and sheer above the sea, curves, ascends, descends, climbs and squirms against the flank of the pine-covered hill. From below, the scent of the sea reaches your nostrils ; it is right below you, rocking its sea-weeds and gently murmuring ; here and there, on the surface, great livid stains like long slabs of green marble, and, behind the bay, stretching out into space, the carved outline of lazy-looking oblong mountains. Passing by the Scirronian rocks, the hold of Scirron, a brigand whom Theseus killed, I recalled gentle Racine's line—

*Reste impur des brigands dont j'ai purgé la terre.*¹

¹ Foul relic of brigands of whom I cleared the earth.

How fat was all those good people's classic antiquity! And yet we have only to see at the Parthenon the remains of what is called typical beauty. I'll be hanged if there ever was in the world anything more vigorous, more natural. In Phidias' tablets the horses' veins are shown down to the hoof and as salient as cords. As to foreign ornaments, paintings, metal necklaces, precious stones, etc., there is a profusion of them. It may have been simple, but at any rate it was rich.'

The whole first inspiration of *Salammbô* and even of the *Tentation* holds in that page: a taste for the East, for Eastern antiquity; a desire to evoke it and to make it live again; a deep feeling for colour, for relief, and for scents; a taste for splendour and gorgeous description, for mystery and for the religious terror of ancient cults; a very precise and exact care for detail in the midst of dazzling brilliancy, and a contempt for those who have simplified and softened all this instead of overloading it with colour, 'riches,' and ornament. Flaubert's imagination understands Eastern classical antiquity, whilst making it more sumptuous, more streaming with light, more dazzling, more encumbered with 'barbaric luxury,' as Virgil

says, than doubtless it really was. This is classical antiquity as seen by Leconte de Lisle—who perhaps 'after all saw it right—but at any rate it is the classical antiquity of the Romanticists, it is *Salammbô*. *Salammbô* already lived in Flaubert's brain in 1851.

See again how he speaks of Romanticism as if it were the very substance of his nature. It is true that this was at the time when he was writing *Madame Bovary*, and he never felt greater romanticist aspirations than whilst writing a realistic book; but still, see what he says: 'What is natural to me is what is unnatural to others: the extraordinary, the fantastic, philosophical and mythological shouts. *Saint-Antoine*¹ did not cause me a quarter of the strain of mind that *Bovary* is giving me; it was a safety-valve; I had nothing but pleasure in writing it, and the eighteen months which I spent in writing those five hundred pages were the most deeply voluptuous in my life.' And he repeats and emphasises his meaning. '*Air! open air!* great, curved phrases, wide, full periods rolling out like rivers, a multiplicity of metaphors, great

¹ He had written but not published a first version of *Saint-Antoine* before *Madame Bovary*, about 1846.

outbursts of style, in fact everything I love. . . .’ Yes, descriptive romanticism; not sentimental, elegiac romanticism; not mediæval, neo-Christian romanticism; but the romanticism of colour and of rhythm, pictural, sculptural, musical romanticism; that romanticism which, because of those tendencies, was ever attracted towards the East or towards classical antiquity as understood by Homer or by the Alexandrians, and thus preserved an Oriental tinge; the romanticism which begins with Victor Hugo’s *Orientales*, and which continues with a great deal of Théophile Gautier, a considerable part of Gérard de Nerval’s work, and the essential part of Leconte de Lisle’s writings; the romanticism which expresses itself in ‘spacious and marmorean’¹ lines and periods—such is Flaubert’s romanticism, and of it were born *Salammbô* and *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*.

‘I am tired of ugly things and vulgar surroundings. I am going to live for some years perhaps in a splendid subject, and away from the modern world, of which I am sick. What I am undertaking is mad and will have no success with the public. Never mind! One

¹ Leconte de Lisle.

must write for oneself first. It is one's only chance of producing beautiful stuff.' Thus Flaubert, on the 11th July 1858, announced *Salammbô* to one of his friends. His prediction was just; *Salammbô* fully satisfied no one but its author. It had no success with the general public. We can repeat concerning it the words of a great lady of the seventeenth century *à propos* of *La Pucelle*: 'It is fine, but wearisome.' A friend of Sainte-Beuve said to him about *Salammbô*: 'It is more tiring than tiresome.' I do not quite catch the shade. It is very tiring and it is equally tiresome. I could not believe in the good faith of a reader who declared that he had read *Salammbô* without letting it rest several times for a while in order to rest himself. 'I want to read Homer's *Iliad* in three days,' said Ronsard. *Salammbô* can be read in three days, but for a wager, and with a firm purpose, and then not with impunity.

The fault lies first with an initial error in the choice of a subject. The historical novel, which is not a more unreal kind of work than any other, all literary kinds of work being unreal except the very simple, unornamented elegy—an historical novel, I say, only interests

us in so far as the times when it takes place are already known to us, and in so far as the events which it unfolds concern one of our passions and move it strongly.

The times must be already known to us, because, if they are not, the historical novel *is too instructive to be touching*. As it reveals to us an unknown world, we immediately look upon it as a history book, and we look to it for information on the country, climate, topography, monuments, manners and customs, costumes, etc., reading it with the same interest as we would an archæological dictionary. That kind of interest, though existing, is contrary to 'interest' properly speaking, and excludes it. Instruction diverts us from emotion, and the more instructive the book the less we are interested. When we feel emotion coming, we thrust it aside as being an element alien to that curiosity which has taken hold of us. The characters may be interesting but they are relegated to the background by details, entirely new to us, in which we are being instructed. There are two ways of securing our interest; one way has been chosen, that is well, but the author must not count upon the other at the same time, for they exclude each

other. The pleasure of being instructed is great, but it is a cold pleasure. That cold studiousness will have nothing to do with romantic emotion, and will not allow of it. When we already know the essentials of the scene of a novel, any new details that it brings us amuse us and occupy our attention without distracting it, they mingle with our emotion like a slight additional interest and like an ornament to the work. Such was the case of Homer with the Greeks, with the Romans and with us ; of Virgil with the Romans and with us, and of *Les Martyrs* with us. Such is not the case of *Salammbô*, which reveals to us a world concerning which we have no notions at all. As soon as we open the book we want to learn about Carthage ; and *Salammbô*, Matho and Narr' Havas, as *dramatis personæ*, leave us indifferent.

Is it not true that, in *Salammbô*, those characters which interest us most, or at least which inspire us with a beginning of interest, are Spendius and the child Hannibal ? That is because we know the Greeks a little, of whom Spendius is here as a type, and we know Hannibal, and are attracted by what is told us of his mysterious and already heroic childhood.

By these two characters, one of whom is not the hero, whilst the other is purely episodic, Flaubert's novel reverts to the conditions which are necessary to an historical novel. In its general constitution, it differs from one.

Again I say that an historical novel only interests us in so far as the events which it unfolds engage or excite one of our passions, either eternal or contemporary. The *Pharsalia*, which is an historical novel, interests us because it represents the struggle between dying Liberty and the dawn of Cæsarism. Any Cleopatra will interest us, because the question is whether Rome or the East will secure the empire of the world. Sertorius interests us because the question is whether a nation, any nation, will keep its autonomy, or whether all will be absorbed by conquering Rome. We should take a passionate interest in the duel between Rome and Carthage, because the question is whether the Roman or the Carthaginian genius will end in mastering the world. In an historical novel, it is necessary that the general destinies of the world, in which we may feel interested, should be enacted very visibly before our eyes.

In *Salammbô*, we witness the struggle between Carthage and the barbarian mercenaries

in her pay, who, deceived by the city, have turned against it. Neither party interests us. It is of no consequence to us that either Matho or Hannon should triumph. Punic ferocity on the one side, barbaric ferocity on the other, it is equally indifferent to us that this or that should be victorious. We find ourselves, while reading *Salammbô*, taking an interest in what is not even mentioned, *i.e.* in Rome; we find ourselves saying, 'Finally Rome will intervene and it will be interesting;' because we know enough history to know that Rome holds the key of the world's fate, and that if Rome intervened the novel would revert to the conditions of the historical novel such as we understand it, and such as it must be in order to hold us.

There is another means of making an historical novel interesting; that is, to treat it as an ordinary novel, and to satisfy us by a curious description of the character's feelings. In that case the historical part of the novel is but the frame or the background of the picture. Walter Scott's best novels are conceived thus, and it is Louis XI.'s soul which interests and holds us in *Quentin Durward*. Note that in this way the historical novel

lowers itself a little, for it becomes a mere novel of moral analysis like any other, or very nearly so, and because the historical interest is no longer the principal element of that historical novel. It would be just as well merely to analyse souls from our contemporary world, it would even be better, for in that case we could consider and judge for ourselves the minute, curious and inward detail which the author describes, while, where souls of ancient times are concerned, we lack that knowledge, and the author can only describe general feelings and present them to us. However, that is a method of treating historical fiction, and I need not point out that it is, or very nearly, the method in which French tragic writers and Shakespeare himself have treated tragedy.

Now Flaubert knew not how to employ that method. If we consider things in that way, the two heroes of his drama are Salammbô and Matho ; now neither the one nor the other is at all penetratingly analysed. Matho is passionately in love and that is all. Salammbô is confused and enigmatical. Flaubert himself owns in his letter to Sainte-Beuve that he could not know her, the Eastern woman being inaccessible. Then where are we ? We are

thrown back upon the historical element, and I have already said why, in *Salammbô*, it presents but a slight-interest to us.

Yet another way of exciting interest is the attraction of mystery. We all are very sensitive to it, however positivist we may fancy ourselves to have become. An obscure, hidden force, greater than man and his designs, and acting unexpectedly across events, though remaining vaguely logical, fills us with a somewhat anxious curiosity and a dawning terror which is an undeniable 'interest.' Flaubert sought that element of emotion ; he invented the Zaimph or sacred veil which holds the fate of Carthage, as that of Troy was wrapt in the Palladium. Nothing could have been more happy as a poetical instrument, but he handled it badly. The Zaimph should have occupied our mind unceasingly, it should have held our attention and only let it go at rare intervals. Instead of which it disappears in that too prolific poem ; we lose sight of it, then we find it again ; we say to ourselves that that is what we must remember, but we do not remember it ; the author has not succeeded in making us remember it, or at least in making of it our continual, subconscious, preoccupation.

Finally, it is absolutely necessary in a great poem that there should be a central character, distinctively, imperiously central, so to speak, and, since it is not the Zaimph, it should be a human being. In the *Iliad*, though it was *composed* afterwards, it is Achilles; in the *Odyssey*, Ulysses; in the *Æneid*, Æneas, though he is not strong enough, or rather it is Rome. In *Salammbô* there is an absolute error on that count. The principal character should have been Salammbô, and it is Matho. The principal person should have been Salammbô, that is very evident. What is the subject? The defence of a city. Will it fall? It must be personified. If it is not personified by the Zaimph, it must be personified by Salammbô. This pious virgin, this sacred virgin, consecrated as she is to the purest goddess of the city, and capable of sacrificing her own religion and her very modesty for the religion of the city, for the city itself, is evidently the personification of Carthage. She must at all cost occupy the centre of the picture, and, whether present or invisible, dominate the whole of the horizon. Now, he who constantly attracts our attention is Matho, not even Matho in love with Salammbô herself, which

would be a way of bringing us back to her, but Matho the soldier, Matho the fighter, Matho the head of an army, of a nation. Salammbô, like the Zaimph, sometimes appears, very brilliant, very curiously adorned, very mysteriously attractive, but she glides back again into shadows ; her image disappears behind the struggling masses and the circling dust of the battle-field. Flaubert himself saw this, and admirably expressed it in this criticism of his own work, which is far better than any criticism by Sainte-Beuve, however judicious : ' The pedestal is too large for the statue.' That is it. Above the enormous bas-relief of that gigantic war, above that pile of battles, tumult and carnage, Salammbô appears like a statuette. If the subject of *Salammbô* is ill-chosen, the composition is absolutely defective.

And what shall we say of those monotonous battles ? Even the infinite resources of Flaubert's style were unable to save them from a fatal similitude. Seen close, they are all very different from each other ; at first sight they seem like exact repetitions. Sully Prudhomme says of a cloud, ' We see that it is different without having seen it change.' They, on the contrary, change before our eyes without

becoming different. That is because their constitutive elements are the same; the actors are the same, dressed and armed in the same way, and it is not enough, in order to seem new to us, that they should do slightly different things. Even the compilers of the *Iliad* were unable to avoid that fault, though they certainly tried to do so. There the incurable monotony of battles between two peoples, always the same, is alternated by expeditions or struggles of an exceptional character. Now we have the night escapade of two braves who go to steal the horses of a princely foe, then the nocturnal theft of the Palladium, again a battle between a god of waters and the god of flames. And yet there is a bellicose monotony in the *Iliad*. An author should arrange things in such a way that his poem should contain but one battle or at the most two, entirely different in character, a naval battle and a battle on land, perhaps also a duel, but the reader should never be even tempted to say, 'I think I must have read this before.'

What remains in *Salammbô* is its descriptions, some of which have already become classical: the rise of dawn seen from the

terraces of Hannon's palace, 'A luminous bar arose from the east . . .'; Salammbô and the serpent; Salammbô in Matho's tent, which by the way is not a good scene, for it is altogether plastic, and we should have been interested in Salammbô's feelings at this juncture; however, the colour and design are of incomparable beauty.

Finally, as we should try to understand when we cannot admire, and as modern criticism should begin by understanding what it does not like, we must realise that Flaubert, like all great artists, wrote but to satisfy himself, and that, if he does not satisfy us in *Salammbô*, he satisfied himself in that work more completely than in any other. His dream of the East; his taste for colour, for horrors, for the lugubrious; his complex pleasure in bringing realistic precision into the most unbridled, unchained and tempestuous imagination—all this found full satisfaction in *Salammbô*. And *above all*, Flaubert himself, his ardent misanthropy and bitter pessimism, found in *Salammbô* the most fitting subject. A time and place where hatred, thirst for vengeance, avarice, refined or ferocious cruelty, love in the shape of sensual

madness, and religion in the shape of monstrous ferocity, formed the background of the picture, indeed the whole of the picture, without a gleam of light or purity; a time and place where no good feelings, no good instincts existed; a time and place where man was an animal, either atrocious and brutal or wily and atrocious . . . such was evidently Flaubert's dream of a beautiful subject, and we must own that in this he had well chosen, and again that his talent fully served his design.

CHAPTER V

THE ROMANTICIST : 'LA TENTATION DE SAINT-ANTOINE'

AND yet there is one work of which he had dreamt even more, because while quite as sad, it had a philosophical turn which pleased his meditative though shallow mind. *Salammbô* and *La Tentation* represent the two sides of the medal. *Salammbô* is a material pessimistic novel, *La Tentation* an abstract pessimistic novel. The facts in *Salammbô* suggest a pessimistic thought as a conclusion, whilst a pessimistic idea gives birth to *La Tentation* and creates facts and pictures which are manifested and made palpable in the book. *Salammbô* is a nightmare of facts, *La Tentation* is a nightmare of ideas turned into pictures in order to become visible. According to Flaubert himself,¹ *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* was evidently inspired in him by a picture by

¹ 'Souvenirs intimes' by Caroline Commanville, prefacing Flaubert's *Correspondance*.

Breughel, which he saw at Geneva in 1845, rather than by the *Second Faust*, which made a deep impression on him, particularly the episode entitled *Klassische Walpurgisnacht*. In its primitive and legendary state, *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* is nothing but the story of a saint tempted in his flesh by the Devil, with the help of every artifice that the Devil can dispose of. In Flaubert's final conception, the temptation of St. Anthony becomes the story of a man or rather of Man, mentally tempted by all the illusions of thought and of imagination. St. Anthony, in the mind of his first historians, is simply a second Adam, seduced by Woman under Satan's inspiration. St. Anthony, in Flaubert's mind, is a Faust, more ingenuous, quite incapable of irony; not a Faust playing with his illusions and with himself, secretly persuaded that he can withdraw when he chooses, but a Faust surrendered, accosted and caressed by every possible form of the universal illusion.

The idea was a great, even a dramatic one. A philosophical poem can only fully satisfy the mind when it presents to us the whole of Man, or at least, when it suggests a general idea in which we can easily fit in the whole of

our idea of Man. *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* answers admirably to that definition. Before the eyes of St. Anthony a procession slowly passes of all the pleasures of the senses, and especially of the mind, of all *attractions*, of everything which calls us away from ourselves, from the feeling of our misery, from the sense of our own inaptitude either to enjoy or to know, everything which persuades us that we can escape from our immobility and go towards that which we desire to hold or to understand.

That perpetual immobility of St. Anthony is indeed a stroke of genius, though Flaubert himself was perhaps unconscious of it. Faust goes about in the world ; he is therefore active, a seeker of adventures, inquisitive and enterprising ; he will probably end by activity properly so-called, a creative activity, in fact he does end by it. St. Anthony remains motionless. Motives of action or of thought come to him. He does not follow them, he is entirely passive, and his resistance is that of inertia. That is how he should be. He has been touched—Heaven preserve me from saying that he has been touched by Christianity, which contains all the germs and motives of the

most healthy activity—but by a doctrine which is also contained within Christianity, and which is called Christianity by those who see nothing else in it. He believes that everything is vain except God, and that therefore nothing in the world is worth troubling about or co-operating with, that nothing is worth being known or understood. And as that consequence is a monstrous error, a suppression of the nature itself of man, which man cannot suppress, the whole of the Universe comes to solicit St. Anthony. In short, all the natural and necessary inclinations that St. Anthony wished to uproot and destroy within himself revolt against him and persecute him.

And thus, before St. Anthony ever motionless, the whole of the Universe passes, showing itself under the thousand shapes of sensual pleasure, of power, thought, imagination and reverie. *Libido sentiendi, libido dominandi, libido sciendi*, and all their kinds and varieties become the ever renewed procession passing before St. Anthony and saying to him ‘Come!’ The idea is at the same time very great and admirably just.

‘But it would require a stronger writer than I,’ wrote Flaubert, dreaming of that magni-

ficent subject. He is too modest this time, but we must allow that he is not altogether mistaken. The execution is far below the design. As ever in Flaubert’s work, the descriptions and pictures are the best part of the work. Only there is but one of them. It is the scenery of the beginning, the mountain in the Thebaid, the rocky enclosure in which the hermit turns backwards and forwards as in a voluntary prison, and the horizon of plains and valleys over which the saint’s eyes wander from the height of his observatory. But the procession of deities, of animated things or beings, is very boring. It is monotonous, not from a lack of words, but from a lack of ideas. And there should have been an infinite variety of ideas, after the manner of Goethe, in order to fill and to diversify that immense programme. Then, very soon, Flaubert’s fundamental intellectual vice takes possession of him. He loves that which is grotesque, ridiculous, mean. And the mean, the ridiculous and the grotesque end by invading the whole of his work. The review of ancient times which forms the most considerable episode in the *Second Faust* without being complete (how could anything of this sort be so ?) takes everything into account—ugli-

ness, beauty, buffoonery, seriousness, grimaces, sweetness, hideousness, radiance; and it all seems to me somewhat chaotic, no doubt purposely, but the general impression which remains is that of an aspiration towards beauty. The episode ends by the radiant vision of Helena, personifying Beauty; and before it is ended, at the beginning of it even, we are given, as I believe, its secret meaning, its inner signification by the following passage: 'What an unpleasant vibration, what oscillations, what shocks, what summersaults, what insupportable discomfort! Yes, said Seismos, but it is I, I alone who am doing those things. I shall get the credit for them at last. And without my shocks and summersaults *how could this world be so beautiful?* Would your mountains stand up against the blue of the magnificently pure ether if I had not pushed them up from the ground? Indeed it was a picturesque, enchanting sight when, in the presence of Night and the Chaos, our first ancestors, I behaved valiantly and together with the Titans played with Pelion and with Ossa as if they had been marbles. We romped with a juvenile ardour until the moment when, wearied out, we finally thoughtlessly placed the two moun-

tains on the summit of Parnassus, like a double cap. Apollo now lives merrily up there with the Chorus of the happy Muses. For Jupiter himself and for his lightning I have put up a sublime theme. Now again, with a prodigious effort, from the bottom of the abyss I have emerged and I am loudly calling joyous inhabitants to me for a new life.’

It is that aspiration towards the beautiful through effort, through ungraceful summersaults and grimacing labours, through pain, accident and ugliness which on the whole we feel from one end to the other of that classical episode.

It is almost the contrary that we feel from one end to the other of the *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*; it is a curious research of everything that is ugly, mean, burlesque or disenchanting. It is true that there are some moments of slight relaxation, and I should be sorry not to quote the beautiful though somewhat commonplace page in which Flaubert makes Venus to appear and gives a slight sketch of the ideal of classic times. ‘High on the staircase of the gods, among clouds as soft as feathers, scattering roses as they whirl, Venus Anadyomene looks at herself in a mirror; her gaze

glides languorously under somewhat heavy lids. She has long, fair tresses unrolled on her shoulders, small breasts, a narrow waist' (this is not classical!), 'broadening hips like the outline of a lyre, two round thighs, dimples about her knees, and delicate feet. A butterfly plays not far from her mouth. The splendour of her body lays a halo of brilliant pearl around her; and the whole of Olympus is bathed in a rosy dawn gradually reaching the heights of the blue sky. . . .' And Hilarion says: 'They (the gods) leant over from the height of the clouds in order to direct the swords; they could be met with on the roadside or possessed in private houses, and that familiarity deified one's life. It had no end but to be noble and beautiful. Loose garments facilitated nobility of attitude. The voice of the orator, exercised by the sea, beat in sonorous waves against marble porticoes. Ephebes, rubbed all over with oil, wrestled naked in the sunshine. The most religious action was the exhibition of beautiful forms. And these men respected wives, old men, suppliants. Behind the Temple of Hercules stood an altar to Pity. Men sacrificed victims with flowers round their fingers. Memory itself

remained exempt from the corruption of death. Only a few ashes remained. The soul, mingled with boundless ether, had gone to the gods.’

Philosophical thought itself, neither very strong nor very original, as is always the case with Flaubert, occasionally finds, however, some lucidity and some beauty in the *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*. Notice, in that respect, the argumentation of the Devil, towards the end of the poem. ‘Does the exigency of thy reason make the law of things? No doubt evil is indifferent to God, since earth is covered with it. *Is it from powerlessness that he bears with it, or from cruelty that he preserves it?* Dost thou think that he is constantly readjusting the world as an imperfect work, and that he watches every movement of every being from the flight of the butterfly to the thought of Man? If he has created the universe, his Providence is superfluous. If Providence exists, the created being is defective. But good and evil concern but thee, like day and night, pleasure and pain, death and birth, which relate to a corner of space, to a special *atmosphere*, to a particular interval. Since the Infinite above is permanent, the Infinite alone is.’

Again the idea was not lacking in strength

both with regard to composition, since it produces an effect of final broadening out, and with regard to likelihood which gave to St. Anthony as a last 'temptation' the spectacle of fecund matter in full travail, in full creative ebullition. Indeed the greatest and the most lively 'temptation' of the mind is naturalism. That which is most capable of making man forget his duties to himself—of which the first consists in knowing himself to be distinct from nature, and in knowing how and why he is so—that is this sort of attraction, this sort of intoxication which inclines us, before the magnificent whirlpool of matter, to throw ourselves into it and to become absorbed into its abyss. In one word, 'all the dignity of man consisting in thought' (Pascal), the greatest temptation of the mind is a latent desire to renounce thought. It is quite possible that Flaubert only thought it out very hazily, but he must have had a confused intuition of it when making St. Anthony say: 'O joy! joy! I have seen the birth of Life; I have seen the beginning of Motion. The blood in my veins beats so hard that they will break. I want to fly, to swim, to shout, to howl. I would I had wings, a shell, the bark of a tree! I would blow smoke, carry

a trunk, twirl my body, divide myself into everything, be in everything, emanate like scents, develop like plants, flow like water, vibrate like sound, shine like light, crouch over every form(?), penetrate every atom, descend into the very bottom of matter, be Matter itself !’

Note that this is not the actual end of the work. After that last temptation, Night, full of demons according to the belief of early Christian poets—Night retires, the sun shines, and ‘in the very middle of the Sun’s disc, the face of Jesus Christ shines forth. Anthony makes the sign of the cross and resumes his prayers.’ Which means that St. Anthony has received grace. At the very moment when his temptation was strongest, at the very moment when he renounced his whole being, when he made not a single personal effort to rise, being evidently incapable of making that effort, he sees God and resumes his prayers. A gift from God, pure, full, absolute grace. The work thus ends as a Christian poem, and it is right on the whole that it should conclude in this way, bringing it back, so to speak, to its primitive origin and conception.

It is therefore possible to feel some admira-

tion, and if not some emotion, some interest now and then whilst reading that philosophical poem. Still, besides being dull, it is weak in thought, it loses itself in things mean and grotesque without being amusing. And above all, it bears witness to a prodigious effort of which the traces have not been wiped away and which gives us a sensation of deadly fatigue. Flaubert almost always produces that effect. Never has he known gay, abundant, happy creation, playing with its easy flow and smiling at it. But that weary sensation is more marked and more painful while reading *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* than in any other work by our author.

CHAPTER VI

THE REALIST: 'MADAME BOVARY'

SOME people go so far as to say that Realism is honesty in Art. In any case it meant honesty to Flaubert, a sort of heroism of honesty. In his heart he was a Romanticist, and I will not merely ask, 'Have we not sufficiently proved that he was?' but, 'Has he not himself said it enough?' Only he said to himself that Romanticism does not go without a certain amount of quackery, a certain amount of humbug by which the author takes in both his readers and himself. He said to himself that Imagination is a great liar who always takes advantage of freedom from control, and who is too easily satisfied, even when most strict in its self-inquiry. Again he said to himself that a work of imagination is always too easy, though of course relatively so, and he, of all artists that ever lived the most conscientious, considered it his duty to undertake that which cost him most pains.

He well knew the extreme difficulties of Realistic Art, and has said very true things on the subject ; for, though he was but a poor critic of general ideas and of the work of others, he was not a bad critic of himself. The immense difficulty of Realistic Art is that it has to paint average humanity, that which is above the average being also real but not appearing to be so. And average humanity means mediocre beings, beings who are not markedly distinct from each other, and who yet must be drawn very distinctly from one another in order to be interesting and even to be real. ' Here,' writes Flaubert, ' I have two mediocrities in the same environment who must, however, be differentiated. If I succeed it will be very clever, I think, for it means painting colour over colour, without marked tones ; but I fear that all this subtlety will be boring, and that the readers would prefer more movement. Still, one has to do what one has conceived.'

It was therefore through an energetic, almost fierce honesty that Flaubert made himself a Realist, or rather that, of the two men, the two artists whom he felt within himself, he forced himself to follow the Realist, him whose task

was the harder and the more austere. It might be said of Flaubert that imagination was his Muse and reality his conscience.

Besides, Realism as he understood it was an absolutely new thing, and therefore much more difficult than what had been known hitherto under that or similar names. Classical realism—the realism of Scarron, of Furetière, of the *Caquets de l'Accouchée*, of Le Sage, and of Marivaux's novels—certainly is realism of the best; but it is mixed with gaiety and satire, which is of course not prohibited, but which lightens the writer's task by amusing the reader and even the author himself, and admits of changes of tone and accent. Balzac's realism is certainly realism, but it is extremely mixed. It is mixed with romanticism in very large doses and even with large doses of fancy. Balzac, whether by chance or purposely, probably through the influence of his epoch, has used realism in the description of things, *some* realism and *some* fancy in the painting of people, and fancy almost exclusively in the relation of events. The quality of this mixture offers food for discussion, but it certainly renders the writer's task easier by throwing variety into the work.

Flaubert was the first to say to himself that realism should not be merely given a share, but that a realistic novel should be wholly realistic, and that if a writer is by nature both a Realist and a Romanticist he should place his realism in one book and his romanticism in another, not both in the same work. He did so, as we know. He also wrote, in a passage which contains a very true view, though also an error in fact: '*L'Éducation Sentimentale* was an effort towards fusion between those two tendencies of my mind, though I was unaware of it. . . .' (Here is the error, *Sentimental Education* is purely realistic.) 'It would have been easier to make one book human and another lyrical.' This again is not quite correct, for it would not have been *easier* to do so; but it would have been nearer the truth and better in method, it would have been according to the laws of Art, and that is especially what Flaubert meant.

He desired, when a realist, to be wholly a realist with no alloy, no diversion, and he set that law upon himself. Now this was absolutely new in France. '*Madame Bovary* founded Realism in this country. It came in its own time. People were tired of imaginative litera-

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ture. I put no faith in any of the 'Laws' of literary history except in that which consists in saying that a fashion, succeeding another, fails if it is not the absolute converse of that which preceded it: action and reaction. This law is acceptable, it is sufficiently verified by the history of French literature. A period of romantic literature has always been followed by a period of realistic literature; a time when we demanded of Art a lively picture of the truth has always come after a period when we enjoyed the magic of imagination. It remains to be seen whether this is the case with other nations (I am not quite sure that it is); at any rate we Frenchmen, being an imaginative as well as a practical people, and inclined to distrust our imagination and to smile at the very moment when we give way to it, cannot follow our imaginative writers for more than a certain time; then we ask to be landed again in realities. As reality in itself is somewhat monotonous, we soon tire of it, and turn again towards works of fancy until some other kind of monotony wearies us in its turn.

Now in 1850 Romanticism was exhausted, and Balzac, Stendhal and Mérimée had inspired a taste for Realism without fully satisfying it.

Balzac, as I have already said, remained up to his waist in Romanticism. Mérimée, a precise and exact realist in *La Double Méprise* and *Arsène Guyot*, had a somewhat unaccountable preference for realism away from home, and liked to apply the methods and virtues of realism to exotic subjects. His was a foreign realism, truth beyond the Pyrenees. Stendhal showed himself a realist of the same kind in *La Chartreuse de Parme* and in a few short stories ; otherwise his was rather a penetrating psychology than realism properly speaking, and produced a sensation of truth rather than of realism, though certain parts of *Le Rouge et le Noir*, particularly the first part, and many pages in *Les Mémoires d'un Touriste*, were already Realism itself. But though these three great writers had awakened the taste for realism, they had not fulfilled the idea of it. It was for *Madame Bovary* to reveal fully what realism meant, and to satisfy the powerful though confused desires of the reading public. Is it true that, while Flaubert was working desperately at *Madame Bovary*, and through one of those indiscretions which prove that one should never write to a woman but to say, 'How are you?' and 'I love you,' Musset

looked through some of Flaubert's confidential letters and exclaimed, 'Bah! he is working like a nigger; he thinks he will surpass us all, and he will merely produce some washed out Balzac, you will see'? Musset would have been greatly mistaken, which is not to be wondered at considering the inadequacy of his data. The result was exactly opposite; the Balzac which Flaubert offered us was not washed out, but pruned, purified and condensed.

Madame Bovary gives an impression of life itself both in its complexity and in its precise detail. It has been remarked a thousand times that Balzac begins by a description of his scenery, of the place where his *dramatis personæ* are about to move, of the dwellings they will inhabit; then he takes up his persons themselves and describes them, their clothes, their faces, their physique, their expression; finally he sets them going and gives them speech. A Comtist would call the first part of his novels 'static' and the second 'dynamic.' This means that though Balzac had sharp eyes, he had not that comprehensive glance which takes in a view of the whole, or else that he had not the gift of painting everything at once without destroying lucidity. Flaubert had

that gift. His descriptions of things mingle instantly and without confusion with his descriptions of people ; his *dramatis personæ* act as soon as they appear, and their surroundings become present to us as soon as they themselves do. In the very first interview between Bovary and Emma, the farm, Emma, old Rouault, everything rises before us in one page : ‘ It was a substantial-looking farm ; in the stables, looking over half-open doors, fine cart horses could be seen. . . . A young woman in a blue merino dress trimmed with three flounces came to the door to receive Monsieur Bovary, and brought him into the kitchen where a great fire was burning. The servants’ midday meal was being cooked. . . . Charles went up to the first floor to see the sick man. He found him in his bed, sweating under his blankets, and having thrown off his cotton nightcap. He was a fat little man of fifty. . . . ’

It is thus right through the book. When Flaubert takes us to Rouen with Emma, he does not begin by a minute description of Rouen. We live in Rouen with Emma and with Léon, and we see the city gradually as they do, rising up around us as it rises up around them, mingling with our view of them

as it mingles with their life. There is but one exception, the description of Yonville, at the beginning of the second part. I do not like it. But it is only four pages, and may be considered as a rest, a truce given to our attention by the author. Indeed it is not altogether outside the action. Madame Bovary leaves the town of Tostes where she is bored to death. We ask ourselves, 'Will she find more amusement at Yonville?' It is not a bad thing that we should be carried to Yonville before she arrives in order that we may think: 'She is coming; we are expecting her. Alas! she will not be less bored here.' It is not a bad thing that we should await her there.

But, as a rule, each character and his surroundings are painted as a whole and form a whole, just as in reality we see the objects and scenery which surround a person because of that person, and because they form his background and surroundings. It has been said that the rule was to describe nothing that the characters could not themselves see distinctly, and that it was therefore ridiculous to mention the mediæval shoes worn by a nobleman entering a banqueting-hall and only seen down to his waist by the guests already seated. On

that principle some descriptions in *Madame Bovary* might be criticised ; seen closer, all are justifiable. For instance, Emma holds in her hand a letter which she supposes to be fatal, and which she dare not open in her rooms without fear of being surprised. She goes up to the garret. ‘Emma pushed the door open and went in. A sultry heat came down through the slates of the roof, beating on her temples and suffocating her. She dragged herself to the closed attic window and drew the bolt, suddenly letting in dazzling light. Above the roofs opposite, fields stretched away into the far distance. Below her, the village square was empty ; the pebbles on the foot-path shone in the sun, the weathercocks on the houses stood motionless ; from a corner in the street a sort of roaring noise came out of a lower window with strident modulations. Binet was turning his lathe.’ To begin with one can but admire the close and concise exactness of this description ; then note the dramatic contrast between the heavy, sleepy quietude of a summer afternoon in the village and the moral tempest in which Emma is overwhelmed. But some one will say : ‘All that should not be painted because Emma

never saw it; she saw nothing; she is too much moved to notice the shining pebbles and to hear Binet's lathe.' But she did. Emma saw all that, rapidly, without looking at it; she felt it rather than saw it; but she had a hurried sensation of it *because she was accustomed to see it*. The open window suddenly threw all those sensations at her, or produced in her an unconscious recollection of all those sensations. If in that description there were a single accidental unaccustomed detail, such as a crow crossing the sky from east to west, it would from that one detail become wrong in its entirety, for Emma would not have seen the accidental detail. But there is none; I should almost say, there could not be one, for Flaubert lives so completely with his characters and in his characters that he only sees what they see and feels what they feel. We have here perfect realistic art because we have absolutely impersonal art. Apply this criticism to all the descriptions in *Madame Bovary* and I do not think a single one of them will fall under the severest criticism.

As to the characters, no words are strong enough to say that they are truth itself, reality itself, and that, in my opinion, Flaubert far

more than Balzac 'competes with civil registers.' Whether simple silhouettes or life-size portraits, all are perfect, every one of them living the minutest life without a moment's alteration of their outline. 'They are indeed created. Binet, Rodolphe, Léon, old Rouault, Lheureux, Father Bournisien, Homais, Bovary, Emma, all are equally living. Note that there are ten of them, that they all are vulgar, mediocre people, and that they are marvellously distinct, each dwelling in our memory with his own admirably individual physiognomy. Is that true which has been said of Balzac's characters, that they are men with whom we have lived, and whom we know better and remember more precisely than the real persons whom we frequented in real life? Maybe; but it seems to me truer still of the characters in *Madame Bovary*. I have indeed lived with them. Truly, if I were to meet one of them, not only should I recognise him, but I should know what he was going to speak to me about, what he should say, and in what tone.

And, mark you, they are not *types*. They are not an epitome of humanity, though we may err by thinking they are. Because some

character in classical comedy, or in La Bruyère, or in Balzac presents in a strongly condensed form an inclination or a fault frequently met with among men, we say: 'I know him. I have seen him.' I have seen Harpagon, Gnathon, Grandet, I have just met Rastignac.' That is fairly true, but only partly. The type, vigorously delineated, has recalled to you some man of the same kind, some man whose principal passion is that of the type drawn by the author. And that is good, that is the result of very high art. But it is even more difficult to create a being who is neither a type nor a *résumé*, and who yet gives you the impression that he exists, that you know him, and that you have met him somewhere. For this is the difference: a while ago, *à propos* of Harpagon, you remembered *some one who was like Harpagon*. Now Bovary reminds you, not of some one who was like Bovary, but of Bovary himself, who lives so really that you know him in person, and who became one of your ordinary acquaintances as soon as you had read the book. The characters in *Madame Bovary* are not types; they are men who suggest the idea of one type and of another, and yet of a third; they are men of whom we feel that types could

be made by altering them, by making them greater in a certain sense and by leaving out some very important parts of their personality. But they are not types, properly speaking ; they are real persons, so powerfully alive that we recognise them, not because of our general knowledge of humanity, but apart from that knowledge, almost in spite of it, and only because we know a living being when we see it.

The characters in *Madame Bovary* are people of whom we know the life history even when the author has not had leisure to tell it us, or even to give us its principal outlines. That is an excellent criterium for judging whether a character in a novel has been strongly conceived. There is a better, which is that sensation of life of which I spoke just now, but that criterium is an additional confirmation of it. Now, do we not know everything about the life of the characters in this novel ?

Léon has been brought up by women, his widowed mother, aunts, etc. He has had a vague literary education, has studied a little law, also a little music. He is weak, flabby, lazy, and thinks himself a dreamer in consequence of his reading. He is living in the ex-

pectation of a two years' stay in Paris, which he looks upon in anticipation as the only delicious time in his life. He has small passions, light and superficial, hardly more than juvenile appetites and only moderately imperious. Beneath the surface, the excessive prudence of a peasant with the polish of two generations only. He is destined for *grisettes* of the Latin Quarter, for cheap and easily-ended amours, and afterwards for a marriage with a well-dowered semi-peasant. If he should meet a passionate woman, and if she should fall in love with him, she will certainly conquer him; for, in society, his prudence takes the form of shyness, and he has a vague terror of great passions which upset a man's life; moreover, he is too weak not to let himself go and be dragged along by a passion of this kind if he should happen to become its object. George Sand has met several men of that kind in her life, and has often described them whilst idealising them after her own manner. Flaubert paints this one soberly and clearly, without even a pale aureola. He is platitude itself with some physical elegance. He will be a careful notary, punctual, timid and obsequious. He will never relate the beautiful adventure

of his youth ; not being a vain man, he will prefer to forget that uncomfortable episode, and will indeed forget it.

Rodolphe is the same man, only vigorous, sanguine and enterprising, which does not mean audacious. He is a peasant ; he has been brought up in his property of La Huchette, hunting, shooting, breathing fresh air, whipping his horses, whipping his dogs, pinching girls' cheeks and slapping farmers on the back. He is stingy and cautious like all peasants. He has some vanity, some pride in his tall, well-set figure, and walks with a swinging roll. He likes to wear rings, gaudy watch-chains and showy tie-pins. He has had some mistresses in the town, not in the neighbouring châteaux for fear of danger or trouble. He finds Emma to his taste and especially to his convenience with a blind and often absent husband. Nothing to fear there, even in the future ; one may safely embark. It may last for ten years and end in a gradual cooling off ; it is a good business. He had not foreseen Emma's impulsive resolve to break all her ties and to fly with him. No married woman of the neighbourhood had given him the idea that one could do such a thing. He does not dream of it because he could not dream of

it. If he thought of it, he would probably not venture. Not having thought of it, he begins the attack without any inward excitement, quite calm at heart and consequently capable of great warmth in his commonplace love-making. After the rupture, he merely feels relieved, and meets Emma again without a thrill, without a feeling of compassion even, secretly convinced as he is that she owes him some gratitude; he feels no animosity against her but some annoyance at the unpleasant reappearance of a matter which he had thought done with. He will not marry, at any rate not till he is old and rheumatic. He is a born old bachelor, a man of coarse pleasures. He will frequently allude to his love-affair because it flatters his vanity. 'The handsomest woman in the province. She made a sensation in Rouen when she was there. It has been said that she used to go there on account of M. Léon Dupuis, a notary, now at Yvetot. Quite untrue. She used to go in order to shake off certain recollections. People said she had been my mistress. Bah! in those days they used to put every pretty woman down to me. Good old days, though, very far off, alas! What will you drink?'

Old Rouault might be the father of the preceding characters. Between the peasant properly so-called and the *bourgeois* born of peasants he represents the intermediate generation, the second generation. He is the rich peasant, fond of comfort, of good food and of drink, stingy, but less so than his father, whilst more capable of successful business transactions than of continuous labour and thrift. A wily, cautious man, clever at good bargains and a great frequenter of fairs and markets. A lazy son of his would be Rodolphe or Léon; an active one would be Lheureux or Guillemain, the notary. He is not unkind and has some praiseworthy feelings, family affections chiefly. He loved his wife, and weeps when he thinks of the time when he had her with him and the time when he lost her. He loves his daughter very much, and his rough sorrow when he loses her is deep and violent. He looks upon her memory as sacred. 'Bovary, you will go on receiving your turkey all the same.' A comical trait, but a very touching one; a peasant who gives presents to his widowed son-in-law has a very tender corner in his heart. He feels that death does not destroy a tie but consecrate it. His letter to his daughter, the only

touching, thing in the whole book, is quite admirable : a description of the turkey, some praise of the bird, and please return the basket. Some complaints of bad servants and loneliness. Glad to hear that the young people's business is good, having inquired and heard that there were two beasts in the stable. Would like to make the baby-girl's acquaintance. A plum-tree has been planted for her, to make her some preserves, and no one else is to have any of the fruit. That is all ; the letter is a marvel of truth and of style suitable to the writer. Father Rouault, with all his failings, is the one honest, sensible, straightforward and kind character in the story. All unawares, he shames those semi-*bourgeois*, his descendants. He leads us to think that *bourgeois* are degraded peasants. That is perhaps true with some exceptions ; and those exceptions produce the *élite* after two or three generations.

The Abbé Bournisien is another living being. Of limited intelligence, vulgar, altruistic, obtuse, square and heavy, we feel that he is a peasant's son who has entered holy orders without even knowing what a thought means, and who has done his work for thirty years, faithfully, conscientiously and laboriously, like

a handicraft. All that is spiritual in his conversation is a badly learnt and half-forgotten lesson. The handling of a soul, even a simple one, is a thing completely unknown to him; he does not even make an awkward attempt, but stops and gapes before the problem, perfectly helpless and unable even to begin to understand. He again is not a type. He is a man we have seen who is simply like a few others. He inspires us with true and useful reflections; he makes us say to ourselves that a kindly nature and complete honesty are not sufficient to make a professor of morals without a certain degree of intelligence. Also that a somewhat rough moralist, without refinement, hard even and determinedly sacerdotal in his decisions, but capable of understanding psychological conditions however superficially, would be necessary, even in Yonville. Father Bournisien is one of the *thoughts* in the book. He appears in it, absolutely useless as a character, in order to make us reflect that what all those inhabitants of a small town lack is, first of all, common sense and even moral sense, and also a man who could bring them back to the right path, who could inculcate in them a little sense or at least give them the idea of it

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through the influence of his superiority in intellect as well as in morals. And that is not an attack, as it has been taken to be, but a warning, and there is no reason why it should not be considered as such.

Homais is prodigiously real. Like Emma, he is born to immortality. He represents the conceited stupidity of the small French *bourgeois*, a stupidity developed by a half-education and cultivated by vanity, and that vanity itself developed by the ever-present feeling of a slight superiority of education over his neighbours. Confidence is his essential trait; he always affirms; he never doubts an idea that has occurred to him, but always admires it, and is struck by what it contains that is just, practical, salutary and distinguished. Consequently he is aggressive without malice; he is by no means malicious, but obliging even, and ready to render many a small service which feeds his vanity by increasing his importance. He is aware of the duties which his intellectual superiority demands of him towards his inferiors, and does not conceal from himself the fact that the destinies of the small town in which he lives hang upon him. But he is aggressive because of the wounds to his self-love

inflicted by resistance or by the mere idea of resistance. To differ from him entirely or only partly is to offend him deeply, and he becomes very angry with any obstacle, even an inert one. 'Prejudice, routine, stagnation, rooted stupidity!' is that not enough to anger any one? It would be so easy to take him as a guide and to keep him as such! He is chiefly irritated against the Church and against Religion, and that, not through impatience of restraint, for he has no vices, but through jealousy of a rival. Religion claims to govern souls. By what right? The direction of souls, minds and hearts should belong to Science, and Science means M. Homais. Religion impinges on the natural and acquired rights of M. Homais. That is not to be put up with. Therefore his pugnacity, which elsewhere is intermittent though lively, here becomes vehement, implacable and continuous. Clericalism is the enemy; more, it is the competitor. Not that M. Homais is without religion. He has a God—'the God of Socrates, of Franklin, of Voltaire, of Béranger, and of the confession of the *Vicaire Savoyard*.' But official religion is his enemy in that it is an obstacle to every progress and to the intellectual domination of

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M. Homais over the masses. It is an obstacle to the rights of which M. Homais is the depository and the propagator. It prevents him to a certain extent from accomplishing his exalted mission. Also, by its doctrine of miracles, it is somewhat harmful to the pharmaceutical trade.

M. Homais is not merely a scientist. He is a man of letters and of artistic tastes. He has called one of his daughters *Athalie*; now *Athalie* is a masterpiece, though of dangerous tendencies, but genius must be forgiven a few mistakes. He does not dislike adopting some of the manners and tone of Parisian artists, or to ornament his usually didactic utterances by some of the picturesque language of studios. That is because M. Homais is not a 'type.' The type would invariably make use of pompous, doctrinal, academic language, made up of words often unintelligible to M. Homais. But M. Homais is a real, living man, and consequently offers certain private and personal features. His Importance M. Homais presents an element of light and amiable skittishness, more suitable to a commercial traveller than to a pharmaceutical chemist, which renders him all the more attractive. Though he knows

how and when to assume a grave attitude whilst discoursing, he is capable of a playful use of his talents on some occasions.

Only one person among his surroundings has some slight weight with him. That is Mme. Bovary. He does not entertain the extraordinary idea that she might be his superior, but he feels that she is his equal. He understands that she has some very distinguished ideas and sentiments. She is not a Mme. Homais. If M. Homais were not a very honest man, given up, besides, to great scientific and social preoccupations, he would make love to Mme. Bovary. But he respects her, with a vague feeling of admiration. He never discusses with her. He sees her going through a long religious crisis without trying to combat a weakness that he deplores. It is only after the crisis is over that he allows himself to say with a kindly smile, 'You were a bit priest-ridden.' M. Homais is a gentleman; he respects the weaker sex, and is intelligent enough to recognise chosen souls over whom he would not wish to exert more than the gentle influence of an equal.

M. Bovary, more so than Emma, marks the triumph of the author's talent. For the diffi-

culty was to draw a characterless person and to give him some life and some individuality. And Flaubert has succeeded admirably. Bovary is nullity itself, and in that he is more of a 'type' than the other characters in the novel, representing as he does the immense majority of his social class; yet he has some individual features which give him precision and relief. He is a passive being; he has no exact shape of his own, but is moulded by his surroundings in the same way as water takes the shape of the vessel which holds it. He has no intelligence, no will power, no imagination; he has never thought, dreamed, or willed anything. His thoughts are the thoughts of others; his dreams are inspired by others; his wishes are dictated to him by others. He is essentially executive. Even his feelings, which exist and which are fairly deep, take the form which is demanded of them. They are abundant but amorphous. He loves his wife deeply, but exactly as she wishes to be loved; he loved her with a sensual passion as long as she lent herself to it; now that she has decided otherwise he loves her with a respectful and distant adoration, and does not appear to suffer by the change. He loves his child, and, accord-

ing to his wife's wishes, either caresses her fondly or sends her away from him. An absolutely passive being, he requires a leading rein in order to act, to think, and even to feel. He was married for the first time by his mother; he marries the second time of his own accord, it is true, and because he is in love, but also *through habit*. He is accustomed to go to old Rouault's farm. He is accustomed to look at Emma. He is finally invited, gently pushed, lured by old Rouault as far as to say, 'M. Rouault, I should like to say something to you.' No more; Emma was given to him before he had asked for her. This phrase, 'I should like to say something to you,' constitutes the only *act* of initiative in Charles Bovary's life.

See the admirable page in which the *vegetative* disposition of Charles Bovary is explained and expressed with an easy, apparently careless precision. 'Thus he was happy, without any care in the world. A *tête-à-tête* meal, an evening walk on the high-road, a gesture of her hand smoothing her hair, the sight of her straw hat hanging from the catch of the window, constituted the continuity of his happiness. . . . He rose; she looked out from

the window to see him start, leaning on the window-sill between two pots of geranium and dressed in a loose morning gown. Charles, in the street, rested each foot in turn on the milestone to fasten his spurs on whilst she continued to speak to him from above, pulling up with her mouth and blowing down to him some bit of leaf or flower-petal. . . . He started; and then, along the high-road spreading its endless ribbon of dust, along the hollow by-ways under vaulting trees, along the foot-paths in the fields where the corn reached his knees, chewing the cud of his felicity, the sun on his shoulders and the morning air in his nostrils, he went, his mind at rest and his heart full of the joys of the night. . . . That is it. Bovary is a vegetable. His pleasures and sorrows are passive, deep and confused; thus a peaceful plant or tree which drinks in air, light, water and the juices of the soil. His movements are slow, his life gentle, languid, made up of small things; he has absolutely no understanding of his surroundings. He lives in a sort of flabby torpor and permanent half-sleep, vaguely content to live, with no particular sensations beyond the sensation of being alive, until the day when he is laid

low by a deep wound which causes him horrible sufferings at first, and then a dull, heavy pain, and from which his life-sap oozes out drop by drop until he withers up. But this vegetable is not without an individual physiognomy. It is a succulent plant, an amorphous plant, of soft, indistinct outline. His big, ungainly feet and hands, rounded, peaceful back, heavy shoulders, round smooth face, low forehead, and 'reasonable and embarrassed air,' all suggest a being who will slowly and quietly drift along the waters of life, often without hurt and without noise; a viscous mass, sometimes bruised and torn against sharp rocks without a cry, without a plaint save a low and smothered murmur. *Nos numerus sumus*. He is the innumerable number. He is one of the thousand beings whose destiny it is to go through this life, I do not say without understanding it, for that is the fate of all, but without even beginning to understand a word of it; they do not realise the little corner in which their birth has planted them; they have no general view of their own life, their own existence; they do not look beyond the passing day, the passing hour. And yet they live, miraculously. They live because they

find something or some one to uphold them. It may be social institutions, which place them in an assigned post where they have nothing to do but to follow respectfully or to imitate instinctively those* who have preceded them or those who are placed in similar posts. Or it may be a woman, a wife or a mother, who thinks and wills for them or who watches over them through some instinct. Or it may be a friend, a M. Homais who occasionally leads them into error and usually makes them act fairly sensibly, fairly consistently in everyday life. They may go on thus until a late death. If they fall under the influence of an ill-balanced mind, they themselves assume an ill-balanced appearance, and go on rapidly from fall to fall until they are crushed under the burden of life which they are unable to carry.

Mme. Bovary, the immortal Mme. Bovary, as immortal as the immortal Homais, is the most complete woman's portrait I know in the whole of literature, including Shakespeare and including Balzac. In her case Flaubert did not content himself with suggesting her biography; he wrote it out entirely, minutely, patiently, year by year, sometimes day by day, with the feeling and the understanding

of the necessary evolution of a character and all the successive changes which must occur in its condition, and also of the *dénouement* which must follow. It is the life history of a soul, unrolled before our eyes, with the immanent logic which governs the steps of a human soul.

The essence of Mme. Bovary's soul is romance; and the various forms which this turn of mind assumes in her according to age and to circumstances constitute the whole of her life. Emma Rouault was born of a kind or rather kindly father, devoid of religious or moral sense, somewhat sensual, not very serious, and slightly vain. She scarcely knew her mother, whom Flaubert has left in the shadow, which by the way is a mistake. She was brought up haphazard in the paternal farm until the age of thirteen, learning to read and write and doing nothing at all. About the age of twelve she read *Paul et Virginie*, a book of detestable moral influence in children's hands, and dreamt of 'the bamboo hut, the negro Domingo, Fidèle the dog, and especially the sweet friendship of some good little brother, climbing to fetch her red berries from great trees taller than church spires, or running barefoot on the sand

to bring her a bird's nest.' The romantic spirit was born. It consists in living beyond the horizon. It consists in being incapable of drawing from surrounding objects the savour, grace, charm and even poetry which they always have. The romantic spirit consists in ignoring these things and in believing that savour, grace, charm, poetry and happiness are always elsewhere than where we are. The mania for change, a disease well known by alienists, is but a form of the romantic spirit. Emma Rouault is already slightly tainted by it at the age of twelve.

At thirteen, Emma is placed in a convent. She likes it. She adores pious legends, the poetry, imprudently sentimental and unconsciously erotic, of the hymns, and the beautiful fragments of the *Génie du Christianisme* which she is allowed to read on Sundays as a relaxation. At fifteen, she throws herself into Walter Scott's novels, and the Middle Ages, with their turrets, drawbridges and white-feathered knights, enter into her heart. She becomes acquainted with Lamartine and fills her mind with the sighs of harps and the songs of dying swans. Just at that moment she returns to the farm, her mother no longer

being there, and she takes up the command of the household. The passing from a dreamy, contemplative life to coarse every-day life pushes her back into her romantic dreams. She alternately regrets the convent or dreams of Him who will take her away from the farm, from the emanations of the stable, the smells of the farmyard, all that odour of animalism which floats over rustic houses and penetrates them. Charles Bovary appears. She would have welcomed any suitor. His offer is accepted. Emma is lost. She would no doubt have been lost with any other ; no man can satisfy the romantic mind of a woman, except a novel-writer through his books, and he merely excites and does not satisfy it. Yet a man of unromantic mind, without kindness, without love, but ardent, vain and ambitious, might have given her the illusion of a superior being and led her to hope for a high destiny later on ; these hopes would have carried her through her youth and through the critical age. He might have made her live beyond the horizon. She might have loved, so Flaubert says, one of those plain, shabby scientists who wear a string of orders over a badly-cut coat. She would have loved him, or at least

admired him even before the advent of the orders. For twenty years she would have talked of memoirs, lectures, highly-interesting studies, discoveries, researches, scientific expeditions, the Academy of Science and the Institut. Thus she would have reached the age of forty, living ever in the following year, as is necessary to her nature. The misfortune of Mme. Bovary consists in not having married M. Homais. One cannot help thinking so right through the book, and it adds another feature, another charm to the amiable first-class chemist. We say to ourselves: 'Here is he who could have given Emma the happiness of which she was capable and who would have turned the storms of fatal passions away from her. We always pass our own happiness by.' Has he ever so thought himself? I think not. The idea, though an innocent one, bears an air of guilt which renders it alien to M. Homais. He merely sees the merit of Mme. Bovary as he sees his own, which is the beginning, but the beginning only, of a vague regret that souls made to understand each other should be separated. And it is with a pious expression of the melancholy wail of mankind into which his own plaint

enters confusedly, that he writes on her tomb :
' *Sta viator : amabilem conjugem calcas.*'

But Emma marries Bovary. And Bovary is not M. Homais. He is not a fool, he is a nobody. He bores her hopelessly, incurably. She immediately discovers in him the man of all men most opposite to her own nature ; the man who lives in the present whilst she lives ever in the future, who lives in the real whilst she lives in the imaginary, in the place where he happens to be whilst she can only live wherever she is not. He is the very thing she detests most in the world, he is reality. If only she could talk with him of her unceasing dreams. But he is not only without conversation, he is unable to listen. Everything Emma tells him is so contrary to his temperament that he does not receive it, so to speak. Emma's dream breaks against him as against reality itself. He is a compact wall against which Emma's wings are constantly being bruised and hurt. He was accepted as a *fiancé*, not because he pleased her, but because he represented a change, a morrow different from yesterday. That was something. He lost that slight merit as soon as he became her husband.

Thus Emma is desperately bored, but her

boredom, and regrets are without a precise object. They float in the immense space of the unknown universe. A circumstance occurs to give them a vivifying precision. Emma is invited to a noble and rich country house. During twelve hours she sees the 'high life.' She admires refined things and distinguished men, luxurious things and people. And she feels, or thinks she feels, that she would not be out of place in such an atmosphere. Her ideas become fixed, her dreams take a more concrete form. Among the thousand vague shapes they took, there was one which consisted in a dream of Paris, the boulevards, theatres, the opera, gorgeous *salons*, smart and fashionable men. One of the four or five romantic women who lived within her was a snob, one who admired through hearsay the great world and its prestigious beauties. For some time Mme. Bovary will be that woman. That world also is beyond the horizon. It has the irritating charm of the lovely places that we have passed once and shall never see again. It makes her lowly life seem meaner, her house smaller and duller, her husband plainer and more vulgar: "What a poor man, O God, what a poor man!" she whispered to herself, biting her lips.

And now the possible lover appears in the shape of Léon. He is nice-looking, young, with some natural elegance. At first he inspires Mme. Bovary with no sensual desires. He pleases her because he is, as a man, exactly what she is as a woman, consequently a sort of echo. He dreams of Paris, he has read a few novels, and entertains some opinions concerning Italian music. She can talk to him, he can answer her. There is a likeness between them, a sympathy, no love. But there is some confidential intercourse. In the state of mind and soul which is Mme. Bovary's at that time, this sentimental friendship, this fraternity of dreams might suffice. When nearing her thirtieth year, a moment might come when she would be inclined to fall, but, on the other hand, she might be held back by long custom and by the habit of fraternal intercourse. It often happens that what would have been natural long ago never takes place for the sole reason that it has never taken place. If Léon had remained at Yonville, he might either have caused Emma's fall or prevented it.

But he goes. Emma's boredom increases, the days become heavier and heavier, also her constant dreams. Reality, in its im-

placable monotony, emphasises the emptiness of her life. 'How sad she felt, on Sundays, when the church bells called to evensong! She listened, in attentive stupor, to every tinkle of the cracked bell. A cat stepped warily on the roof, arching its back in the pale evening rays of the sun. On the high-road the wind blew up long clouds of dust. Sometimes a dog howled in the distance. And the bell continued its tinkle at regular intervals, the monotonous sound dying away in the plain. . . . Every day, at the same hour, the school-master, a black silk cap on his head, drew the shutters of his house, and the local policeman passed, his sword slung over his blue smock. Morning and evening, the post-horses, three at a time, crossed the street on their way to the drinking pond. . . .' Emma is exasperated by the slowness of these drops of time trickling into space. She feels that nothing has any hold over her. Presently she no longer even opens a book. 'I have read everything.' She no longer even dreams, for her dreams themselves have become monotonous and present themselves to her ever identical in their form and sequence. She is ready for sin. The author might bring Léon back.

He has not done so, and this is remarkably true psychologically. Certainly Mme. Bovary is on the edge of the precipice ; certainly, if Léon returned, it would be with him, sooner or later, that she would fall. But Léon is similar to Mme. Bovary, with only this difference that he is even weaker in character. It is not likely that she should sin for the first time with him, but with one who, not similar to her, will pretend that he is, thus having that superiority over her that he will act a part in cold blood, keeping his head and she losing hers ; one, also, who is accustomed to women and who can employ tried tactics known to him and unknown to her.

And thus Emma's first fall is original in this profoundly observed feature, that most women, in their first *liaison*, are in love with their lover, and in the following are in love with love itself, whilst in Emma's case it is almost, not quite, the contrary. At the moment when Rodolphe comes on the scene, Emma needs love in this sense that she yearns for a violent distraction from her boredom, for something unexpected in her life. She has no knowledge of love, for Bovary does not count, and she goes towards love, not towards Rodolphe, as towards a

future, a renovation, a sort of revenge. After the fall, her first admirable words are not 'How I love him!' but 'I have a lover! I have a lover!' And that means . . . but it is better to quote—'delighting in the thought as in a new puberty which had come to her. Now she would know that joy of love, that fever of bliss of which she had despaired. She was entering into a wonderful something where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium. An immensity of blue space surrounded her; the summits of romance glistened in her thoughts, and ordinary existence only appeared a long way down, in the shadows, between those heights.'

It is therefore Love itself that Emma loves, rather than Rodolphe. Later she will love Léon rather than Love itself. This evolution, in inverse ratio to the ordinary development, reveals a profound moralist. Mme. Bovary is not exactly a sensual woman; she is above all romantic, what physiologists call 'cerebral,' and therefore her first fall comes from an excursion of the imagination far more than from a surprise of the senses. The desire to become acquainted with love is the reason for her first sin; the second only will be caused

by a wish to give herself to him whom she loves.

Moreover, her whole *liaison* with Rodolphe is chiefly an affair of imagination. It is very well carried out. She dreams with him what she had unconsciously sought to dream alone for the last ten years—the eternal dream of far-away lands, of Spain with its guitars, Italy with its blue waters, the East with its minarets and palanquins. Rodolphe is the vessel, pleasant to the sight and to the touch, into which she pours the romanticism which fills her soul to overflowing. Rodolphe has to be the hero from Lamartine, Byron or Walter Scott whom she has loved since she learnt to read with all the force of her violent and somewhat narrow imagination. He lends himself to it. He has some knowledge of romance. She bores him but does not perceive it, talking too much herself to notice his silence, or else she finds in his very boredom something romantic and finely Byronian. Do not let us mistake. Rodolphe is not he whom Emma has loved most, but he who has satisfied her most, who has best responded to the artificial part of her nature, a nature such that the artificial part of it is the most essential. When she goes

on from Love to the lover, she will be diminished, as another woman would be in passing from the lover to Love itself.

And so the disillusion, the rupture with Rodolphe, is the great, the tragical crisis of Emma's life. Later she will die voluntarily, but this time she nearly dies naturally, which is far more significant, for it means a break in the springs of her being, and not merely a stroke of despair, an hour of madness. She comes within two paces of the tomb. When losing him in whom she had placed her romantic ideal, she loses her ideal itself, renounces it, believes in it no more. Her romantic turn of mind remains; it can never disappear because it forms the very basis of Emma's soul; but the hope of realising it and the conviction that it will be realised disappear or weaken. There are two Mme. Bovarys, one before and one after Rodolphe, particularly after Rodolphe's departure. The second one is but a slow degradation of the first one. The second one shows what a romantic woman gradually becomes when romance has failed her, and who, still detesting reality, seeks to drown her sorrow in pleasure and in sensual excitement.

But there is a transition. For some time

Mme. Bovary still feeds her romantic mind with fictitious food, deceiving it and deceiving herself. She makes elegies and romance of the languor of her convalescence; she acts the part of a sweet young invalid and finds some melancholy pleasure in the attitude. It is becoming to her; she thinks herself interesting and distinguished in the part. She enjoys the sadness of pale hands lying languidly on weary knees. Then she does not exactly try religion, but she comes back to it as to the first form taken in the old days by her romantic instinct, the first object which attracted her imagination. She reads pious books, buys a Gothic *prie-dieu*, mixing as usual literary memories with her feelings. She goes in for excessive charities, tries to have highly-spiritual conferences with the Abbé Bournisien. Sometimes, by dint of training, she succeeds in giving herself an illusion of religious sentiment; she compares herself with Mme. de Lavallière and with Mme. de Longueville, and when a volume which she does not understand falls from her hands, she 'believes herself the prey of the most refined Catholic melancholy that an ethereal soul can conceive.'

This, as I say, is the transition. It does not

last long. It indicates that, even after the crumbling away of her ideal, Mme. Bovary will always preserve some indelible traces of the romantic instinct. And now begins the process of degradation. Mme. Bovary meets Léon again. She has always loved him. He was, in her eyes at least, not the strong, brilliant man who was capable of carrying out the beautiful dream entrusted to him by Emma, but the gentle, graceful man, slightly feminine, slightly weak, but whom she knows she will rule, whose soul she will permeate with her own. With already advancing years, Emma has reached this phase of feminine love; that is, the quest, not of him who will deliciously enslave her, but of him whom she will enslave with her love. Through the particular evolution which is special to her, she has now come to love, not Love, but a being who pleases her, and who presents a similarity and a concordance with herself. That means that Emma's imagination has weakened and that her senses are beginning to take the upper hand whilst the need for forgetfulness and distraction remains. And the romantic Mme. Bovary begins to stand back, without disappearing altogether, whilst Emma the courtesan comes nearer.

That is made visible—and this is an effect as well as a sign—by the change in Mme. Bovary's manners. She becomes a *cabotine*. She smokes, she walks about with a riding-crop, she desires to go to a masked ball, she drinks ; whilst loving Léon alone, she dreams of an operatic tenor whom she has admired one evening in his flesh-coloured tights. Thus we see her descend from a sentimental girl to a romantic woman, from a romantic woman to an amorous courtesan, and from a courtesan to a *cabotine*. This inevitable concatenation of character, in a life which began by a total absence of principle and a curiosity of the impossible, is a complete portrait of the romantic woman of the provinces, and constitutes the lesson taught by the book.

And this inevitable progression can also be seen from another point of view. Mme. Bovary's eternal aspiration was to live beyond the horizon. Now, as she advances in life, the same yearning remains, but the horizon grows nearer, and the 'beyond' is no longer so far away. At first, Emma used to dream of distant journeyings, exotic scenery, gondolas and jungles. Later, she dreamt of Paris and its splendours. Now, her 'beyond the horizon'

is at Rouen, a room in an inn on the quay, with a notary's clerk.

And she is unconscious of this diminishing, this lowering of her ideals; we only suspect that she feels it in a confused way. It would seem so when we look at her constant pursuit after excitement, and at the need, so new in her, *not to dream*, but to flee from herself in a sort of turmoil. Emma is very far now from what she was without having ceased to be the same person; the last effects of the adventures into which her temperament has dragged her both modify that temperament itself and give it the lie. Then the crash comes. Ruined, led into debts unknown to her husband by her extravagance and the carelessness of her house-keeping, Emma finds herself face to face with death or with deepest degradation. She chooses death. Why? It must be acknowledged that there is no very decisive reason. Mme. Bovary *might* have slipped to the bottom of the incline. She *might* have fled, leaving her husband and her child, and thrown herself into a life of prostitution. And it is precisely in order to show that it *might* have been so that Flaubert has led her to the very edge of that path, and has even made her take a few steps

along it. It is like a prostitute to say to Léon : ' Money ! If I were you I should know where to find some. In your office.' It is like a prostitute to go and implore the notary whom she knows to be an admirer of pretty women. It is like a prostitute to go and beg money of Rodolphe, her former lover, who has forsaken her. By all this, Flaubert points out that Emma very nearly fell to the lowest depths, and that, if it was not to be her fate, it is that of women who resemble her. However, he has stopped her just as she was entering this path, partly on account of her horror at entering it.

He was right. Emma was not born a courtesan. She was born with a romantic turn of mind which brought her to become almost a courtesan ; yet she must stop and draw back when her life unfolds itself to her as being henceforth that of a courtesan *without any romantic features*. Emma, deprived of all element of romance, even merely apparent, can only die. For what would her life become henceforth ? It would be a *real* life, as hopelessly real as the *bourgeois* life which she so hated. It is reality that Mme. Bovary never could admit. There are four stages : the

period of dreams without a precise object ; the period of dreams arrested and fixed on the man who is thought capable of realising them ; the period of sensual folly and voluptuous delirium still mingled with some poetry in pleasure, and a feeling that a romance is still being lived, howbeit a vulgar one ; finally the period of merely lucrative *amours*, which are a trade like that of M. Lheureux. This last stage opens before Mme. Bovary and she does not enter it. She feels that here she would really be deprived of her breathing atmosphere, that is, the feeling she has for brilliant or remarkable things, literary things that one could put in a book. When her romantic soul is killed by the necessities of Reality, Emma dies wholly. Her reason for living has now entirely disappeared. Her suicide is not caused by remorse, not exactly by despair ; it is the outcome of a long bruising of dreams, of dreams suppressed and disappointed, until the feeling is reached that they will never arise again.

Such is this wonderful female figure, sufficiently general to be a subject of meditation to all, and sufficiently particular to give the permanent sensation of a complete living being. A type in her soul and essence and an individual

in the detail of her life, in the particular feelings inspired in her by circumstances, in the effect that circumstances have on her, leading her quite logically into certain paths that her temperament alone would not incline her to follow. If you marry Emma to another man, her thoughts will be the same, but her conduct very different. Supposing that she be not perverted by her *liaison* with Rodolphe and the latter's treachery, she will remain the same at heart, but will probably not plunge into degradation with the same yearnings after distraction and revenge. Thus a true portrait is produced or rather a true biography which is not a portrait. A human being is first what he is and then what life makes of him. In order to make a character in a novel seem life-like, it must be like the exact and precise sum of the forces which were born in him and of the various forces which have weighed on him in the course of his existence.

And, *à propos* of that, it is a sign of talent to have placed in Emma's life a circumstance which might have saved her, and which does not save her. Flaubert gave her a child, a 'redeeming child,' and the child does not save her. He wished to point out that the romantic

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instinct is so strong and a fevered imagination so tyrannical, that they are even capable of killing the maternal instinct in a being who is not a monster, however, and who is unbalanced rather than really bad.

The composition of the book is a wonder. The author has found means of making us live the life of a small town without allowing the thousand pictures of it which he shows us ever to impinge upon the principal character, or to draw our eyes away from her. Emma remains ever in the centre of the picture, and we never cease to see her and to feel her presence even when we are being told about Tuvache or Binet. The arrangement of the Agricultural Meeting scene is a masterpiece in that way; in fact all the scenes are arranged in some analogous manner, and there is not one of them, however interesting by itself, which does not bring us back to the central character at the very moment when it seemed to take us away from it. There is nothing in the work that can be criticised on that score, save perhaps the prologue which deals with Bovary's first marriage; and here we must remember that it is necessary to understand how Bovary

came to marry 'Emma. A being entirely without any initiative, he had to be married for the first time by his mother. Only as a widower, and somewhat emancipated by his first marriage, does he feel 'bold enough to marry on his own account, in which, it is true, he was singularly assisted. Perhaps, too, the operatic performances at Rouen, after the Rodolphe episode, are not altogether in the right place. They should have been nearer the beginning of the book, not far from the ball in a château to which Mme. Bovary is invited. They are things of the same category, revelations of the same kind destined to entertain in Emma's mind the same dreams and the same vague desires. But this is but a detail. The general spirit of the book is that of a strict, haughty and conscientious writer. It shows first of all the desire to write what is true, rigorously and undeniably true. Then a too marked hatred and contempt for the provincial *bourgeois*, the man 'who has a low way of thinking and of feeling,' and no doubt we might consider, like Sainte-Beuve, that too much care has been taken to 'admit no really generous soul, no lofty mind, into that small human agglomeration. It certainly is a misanthropical

novel. But will it never be understood that a realistic novel is a picture of average humanity and that generous souls and lofty spirits are the exception? Is it not true that average humanity is composed of beings who are neither virtuous men nor rascals, but vulgar, selfish, conceited, miserly or foolish people? Now if there is no virtuous character in *Madame Bovary*, neither is there a single scoundrel. Flaubert's characters are not even malicious. He makes no mention of hostility or of furious hatreds, so common in small towns. There is hardly any gossiping either. His people are either kindly or almost kindly folk. They are selfish and foolish, that is all. Is this, as seen by a misanthrope, so far from the average truth? And this gives us an opportunity of delineating Flaubert's misanthropy. Flaubert was a misanthrope not inasmuch that he thought men wicked, but in that he thought them fools. He hated human stupidity with a furious execration. It exasperated him. But he did not believe very much in the wickedness of men, and seems to have looked upon it as a negligible quantity. His was not a very ferocious misanthropy.

Finally, from another point of view, this book is an act of ardent reaction against romanticism. Again and again it reads like a pamphlet against romanticism and a warning against its influence. Who is responsible for Mme. Bovary's straying? Walter Scott, Byron, Lamartine, George Sand, poetical albums and love anthologies—all the literature of imagination and of sensibility. Another book of Flaubert's is entitled *Sentimental Education*; this might have been called *Romantic Education*. It is a curious thing, which does honour to them both, that Flaubert and George Sand should have become loving friends towards the end of their lives. At the beginning, Flaubert might have been looked upon by George Sand as a furious enemy. Emma is George Sand's heroine with all the poetry turned into ridicule. Flaubert seems to say in every page of his novel: 'Do you want to know what is the real Valentine, the real Indiana, the real Lelia? Here she is, it is Emma Rouault.' 'And do you want to know what becomes of a woman whose education has consisted in George Sand's books? Here she is, Emma Rouault.' So that the terrible mocker of the *bourgeois* has written a book which is directly

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inspired by the spirit of the 1840 *bourgeois*. Their recriminations against romanticism 'which rehabilitates and poetises the courtesan,' against George Sand, the Muse of Adultery, are to be found in acts and in facts in *Madame Bovary*.

This intention is not doubtful. We read in each line of the novel: '*Bourgeois* are fools; the woman who has aspirations towards an artistic life and who wants to escape from *bourgeois*-dom is the most foolish of all.' Flaubert's eternal dualism, at once his torment and his strength, here appears again. There was in him a Romanticist who looked upon reality as flat and a Realist who looked upon romance as empty, an artist who thought the *bourgeois* ridiculous and a *bourgeois* who thought artists affected; the whole was contained in a misanthrope who mocked at everybody. If *Madame Bovary* is so great a masterpiece, it is because Flaubert has thrown himself wholly into it, and the book has therefore been written by a Romanticist gloating over *bourgeois* types, and by a Realist analysing the brain of one of George Sand's heroines in order to show how nonsensical are her spiritual ambitions. And he took in both executions an extreme pleasure

which went not without some ferocity. Such an opportunity of exhaling at the same time the Romanticists' hatred of the *bourgeois* and the *bourgeois*' rancour against Romanticism was indeed a feast.

As to the morality of the work, I will say nothing about it. *Madame Bovary* may be pernicious or it may be salutary. It is easy to take Emma as a model and to consider that nothing would be easier than to avoid the mistakes in domestic economy which have alone—and not her immoral conduct—led her to death; thus the book will be perverting. It is as easy to believe, as does the author, that material disorder always follows moral disorder, and that the one associated with the other must lead to ruin; thus will the book be highly moral. On the whole, it will be salutary or unwholesome according to the spirit in which it is read, which means that every reader will make of it what he already himself is, and that it is therefore neither one thing nor the other. We might repeat the celebrated though untrue saying, that the book is as moral as Experience is. Only, Experience is not moral. Neither is it immoral. It does not teach Vice, for Vice is not particularly

successful; nor does it teach Virtue, for Virtue is not particularly successful either. It teaches a medium course which is made up of prudence and of the care to avoid excess in all things, in good as in evil. It teaches order, regularity, honesty, punctuality and foresight, all of them average qualities, not virtues. Every Realistic novel, if it is well written, will teach these and nothing else.

Madame Bovary is a very well written Realistic novel.

CHAPTER VII

THE REALIST : 'L'ÉDUCATION SENTIMENTALE'

FLAUBERT, when he conceived *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, seems to have had three designs in view, which, let us own it at once, was perhaps too many : Firstly, to write a contrast to *Madame Bovary* by painting a *pure* woman of the *bourgeois* world, very much in love, but an absolutely good woman ; secondly, to write a fellow book to *Madame Bovary* by painting a man who, as a man, is somewhat similar to Mme. Bovary as a woman ; thirdly, to give a description of Paris and of some French society between 1840 and 1852.

It may be said that he succeeded admirably in his first object and fairly well in his second and in his third, that the general result is uncertain, and that the effect of the whole is not very happy.

Mme. Arnoux is his *pure* woman. I think it is because of her that he believed, as we have said above, that he had written a book which

was half realistic and half idealistic. It is a mistake. A good and pure woman, Mme. Arnoux remains, however, well within the bounds of true Realism ; she is admirably real. Only it is probable that Flaubert, either from his own idea or under the influence of his time, gave the name of Realism solely to the description of immoralities, and therein lies the error. Realism is a picture of average human lives. Mme. Arnoux is well within the average, and one of the beauties of the work is the mastery with which Flaubert has constantly and firmly held her within that average.

Mme. Arnoux is a healthy, well-bred girl of the provincial middle-class. She has excellent physical health, which is not a detail but an essential point ; she has been brought up at home, simply, gently and correctly, until her marriage. She has no imagination. She never reads. After these two statements, it is useless to add that dreaming is unknown to her and that she has never lived beyond her horizon. Sensibility, which does not depend on imagination, and to which imagination merely gives a special form, is very strong within her. She is born to love a good, even a mediocre husband, her children and her grand-children.

She marries a man of the kind that the middle-class in France calls a 'good fellow'; a flighty, vulgar, boasting man, without any moral sense; a man who gambles in business and runs after women; a man willing to oblige, dishonest, generous and familiar with every one; a dispenser of cigars, jokes, protestations and friendly digs in the ribs. She loves him; she loves him to the end, not only enough to put up with him but to pity him, which is touchingly stupid.

The possible lover appears. He is not *repulsed*. Mme. Arnoux is so virtuous, not so much from a sense of duty as from the very essence of her nature, that she is not one of those who need to repulse. She simply loves him who has pleased her with an almost tranquil certainty that she will never give herself to him. She loves him with pain and with delight. She rests on him her weary eyes, weary with tears and with the sights that they see. He is the brother she has never had and whom her sad life lacks. If she had read anything she would say to him: 'Thou alone art my brother, my father, my mother, all the pure affections which are necessary to a loving soul.' A beautiful trait, and a very simple

one, though it would not have occurred to an ordinary writer, is that she is so pure that she makes him pure also, at least whilst he is with her. This is very clearly marked right through the volume, but most deliciously so in this page, which by itself should suffice to immortalise an author. ‘She gave him her gloves, the following week her handkerchief. She called him “Frédéric.” He called her “Marie,” worshipping that name, made, he said, to be breathed in an ecstasy, and which seemed to contain clouds of incense and armfuls of roses. She did nothing to excite his love, lost as she was in the unconsciousness which characterises great happiness. During the whole of that season she wore a home gown of brown silk, a loose garment which suited her graceful attitudes and serious expression. She was then reaching the summer of womanhood, a time of reflection and tenderness, during which approaching maturity colours every glance with a deeper flame. . . . Never had she shown more gentleness, more indulgence. Sure as she was that she would never weaken, she gave herself up to a feeling which seemed to her a right, earned through her sorrows. And it was so beautiful, so new. . . . He trembled

lest he should lose by a word all that he thought he had gained, saying to himself that an opportunity may occur again, but that a mistake can never be repaired. . . . The charm of her person disturbed his heart rather than his senses. It was an undefined bliss, an intoxication such that he even forgot the possibility of absolute happiness. Away from her he became the prey of furious desires. Soon, long intervals of silence began to occur in their conversations. Sometimes a sort of sexual modesty made them blush before each other. Every precaution which they took to hide their love revealed it. The greater it became, the more restrained their behaviour. Practising so great a lie exasperated their sensitiveness. They took a delicious joy in the scent of damp leaves, the east wind hurt them ; they suffered causeless irritation, felt deadly presentiments—a sound of footsteps, the creaking of a wainscot alarmed them as if they had been guilty. When regretful words escaped Frédéric she accused herself. ‘ Yes ! I am doing wrong ! I am behaving like a coquette ! Do not come any more.’ Then he would repeat the same assurances which she heard with pleasure every time.

Frédéric *betrays* her ; he has some mistresses. She forgives him always, though suffering, and continues to love him with the sweet resignation of those who know themselves to be loved, or rather who themselves love. For ‘ the pleasure of love is to love.’ They love each other thus for twenty-five years, with a continual progression in their affection, their intimacy and the union of their souls, and certain that they will never belong to each other. Each of them could say, or almost, Maynard’s lovely verses :—

‘ Ce n’est pas d’aujourd’hui que je suis ta conquête ;
Six lustres ont passé depuis que tu m’as pris,
Et j’ai fidèlement aimé ta belle tête,
Sous des cheveux châtain et sous des cheveux gris.’¹

Thus the years pass by and age comes. But, after it has come, and protected by it as it were, Mme. Arnoux, unasked, comes to see Frédéric, so as to prove to him that far or near, until death which may soon come, he fills her whole soul. She now lives very far away, in Brittany, with her husband, an infirm old man by this time. She delights to sit on a bench

¹ ‘ ’Tis not to-day that first thou hast me in captivity ;
Six lustres past with love thou didst me hold.
Thy beauteous head I love in all fidelity
Fair now with locks of snow as then with gold.’

which she has called 'Frédéric's bench.' For she dreams, now. She is one of those who never dreamt in the future, and who, when age comes, dream in the past, as do deeply pure hearts. She looks at his furniture, ornaments and pictures greedily, so as to take the memory of them away with her. She gathers up the memories of their far-away love. When did she first realise that he loved her? 'One evening, when you kissed my wrist, between my glove and my sleeve, I said to myself, "Why! he loves me!" and I was afraid to make sure of it.' As Frédéric is only a man, he believes for a moment, and without showing that he believes it, that she has come to offer herself. Marie unconsciously undeceives him by the saddest and most sublime gesture of feminine abdication that woman ever invented. She removes her bonnet and unbinds her white hair which falls on her shoulders; she cuts off a long lock and hands it to him. "'Keep it. Farewell!'" And that was all.'

Such is the admirable last page of a wonderful portrait which is, as I have already said, of an absolute reality. There is not a touch that might give Mme. Arnoux an air of romance, of 'lyrical' romance as Flaubert called

it. Mme. Arnoux is not eloquent ; she is not witty ; she takes no attitude ; she never speaks of her duty, hardly ever of her love. She is a good little *bourgeoise* from head to foot. She is simplicity itself. We all have met her, have passed her in the street, and have probably thought her insignificant. Only, hers is a straightforward nature, with a calm imagination, much self-respect, but no self-admiration, and a deeply loving heart ; the whole, simply drawn character is charming and almost heroic. In order to measure the difference both in conception and in the process of description, think of the pure woman in *Le Lys dans la Vallée*, Mme. de Mortsau, and see how Balzac’s romanticism and bad taste have spoilt a fine portrait. Never was Flaubert’s sense of truth more lively or his taste more perfect than in his picture of Mme. Arnoux.

Frédéric Moreau is the type of the little *bourgeois*, fairly gifted, fairly intelligent, with some natural distinction, a good education, and an absolute lack of strength of character. He is ‘a man of every weakness,’ as Flaubert tells us, perhaps somewhat late in the novel. He is the man who ‘promises himself every night that he will be bold,’ and

who promises himself every morning that he will be somebody. He is endowed with a marvellous incapacity for action. A soft, flabby being, he is not unlike Bovary. Only, as he has some intelligence and some imagination he is inactive and restless at the same time, and remains inactive in agitation as Bovary remains inactive in a sort of torpor. Moreover, he too is a passive being, dependent on his friends, his mistresses, his acquaintances, circumstances, on everything in fact except on himself. It is wonderful to see him a philosopher under the influence of one friend, a journalist at another's bidding, and a politician under the impulse of the events of 1848; he lends to one man, promises money to another, gives to one the sum he had put in reserve for another, and only at the age of fifty discovers that his life has been but a zig-zag, and that his real and imperious vocation was to do nothing at all.

Such a man would be in love all his life long, without violence, but with a sort of natural obstinacy. Laziness always having the effect of making a man live by his feelings alone, a lazy man can hardly be anything else than a lover or a dilettante. The most distinguished

members of that human family become dilettanti, the others are perpetual lovers. Frédéric is something of a dilettante, and is eternally in love, simply because he seeks easy sensations, and also yearns to be ruled. It is in this that Frédéric resembles Mme. Bovary. He has the same fundamental indolence and the same constitutional dreaminess, the same untidiness in his habits and the same easy generosity, the same romanticism (more superficial in Frédéric) and the same vision of distant travels and of the picturesque East, also the same sensual ardour and the same incapacity to think of anything for long except love. ‘He kept up his literary plans through a sort of point of honour with himself. He wished to write a History of *Æsthetics*, the *result of his conversations with Pellerin*, then to dramatise the French Revolution and to compose a big play *under the indirect influence of Deslauriers and of Hussonnet*. In the midst of his work the face of one or of the other’ [of his mistresses] ‘would pass before him; he struggled against the yearning to go to her, and presently gave way to it.’ The whole character is epitomised in these few lines.

One essential trait is an admirable piece of observation, rendered with astonishing technique. Frédéric's only strength lies in his imagination, as is the case with all weak beings. Therefore 'crystallisation,' to employ Stendhal's word—meaning the effect of imagination upon love and the tenfold development of love through the collaboration of creative imagination—is extraordinarily powerful in Frédéric's case. In a being who is helpless in action, imagination takes the place and does the work of other faculties, moulding matter, travelling to the ends of the world, building palaces, planting parks, opening avenues and creating the universe which Desire demands. If it is applied to love, having been set in motion, whipped and spurred by love, it surrounds the loved object with draperies of its own weaving and embroidering; it builds, paints, sculpts and decorates a museum or a temple. It plunges both hands into Nature's bosom and brings every treasure to the loved one. Such are the splendid jewels which imagination throws over and around the loved object. That is 'crystallisation.' And see 'Frédéric at work in the process: 'The contemplation of this woman enervated him like the use of too strong a per-

fume. It reached the depths of his temperament, and became almost a *general manner of feeling*. Prostitutes whom he met in the gas-light, singers uttering their trills, circus riders galloping by on their horses, middle-class ladies in the streets, *grisettes* looking out of their windows, each and every woman reminded him of that particular woman either through some likeness or through some violent contrast. He looked into the shop-windows at shawls, laces or jewels, imagining them draped round her, ornamenting her bodice or sparkling in her dark hair. The flowers in florists’ stalls blossomed that she might choose them in passing; small satin slippers trimmed with swansdown in a shoemaker’s shop seemed to be waiting for her foot; every street led to her house, cabs waited on the rank to take him there quicker. Paris was centred in her person, and the great city with all its voices sounded like an immense concert around her.’ It is a development, though Flaubert was unaware of it, of the Abbé Cotin’s celebrated line—

‘Tout m’en fait souvenir et rien ne lui ressemble.’¹

¹ ‘Everything brings her to my mind and nothing resembles her.’

And it is Stendhal's 'crystallisation' in all its precision. But note that it is the crystallisation of an imaginative man who is not a poet. A poet would himself create the dazzling crystals which cling as from their own accord to the delicate stem of his love. Each mica that Frédéric every moment adds to his is borrowed from reality, for he has enough imagination to bring the whole world to his mistress, but not enough to create a universe around her. It is but a half-imaginative crystallisation.

Frédéric is loved, moreover, as such men always are. Women are attracted by strong men, but they succumb to weak ones. They are not afraid of them. They love them as they love supple silky garments and soft furs. Frédéric is loved by a lady of the middle-class, by the wife of a great financier, by a courtesan and by a precocious and fanciful girl. He loves them all: the first one respectfully, the second through vanity, the third through sensuous greed, and the fourth from curiosity, in each case with a timidity which delights and enchants them. He finds himself extraordinarily encumbered with them all, and unable to decide between them, indecision being a fundamental part of his nature. They

all end by escaping him, some after having been his, others after having been desired and desirous, and he finds himself towards the end of his life alone with himself, looking back upon a life which has been an absolute failure and which has never been happy. Such is Frédéric’s *sentimental education*, or rather, for the title is none other than an improper expression, the series of sentimental experiences through which Frédéric learns that life is a great deceiver, and especially that he himself is a fool.

On the whole, Frédéric might be the son of Bovary and of Mme. Bovary. He has the flabbiness, passiveness, timidity and indecision of the one; and from the other he has inherited some intelligence, some imagination, romantic tastes, a very feeble moral sense, improvidence, carelessness and an exacting sensuality. That middle-class young man is the epitome of his race. His end seems a little less sad than that of his spiritual parents, but it is not so in reality. It is *nothingness*, far more so than that of Bovary and Emma. Bovary dies of a complex grief in which the despair of love holds a great share, and which is still noble to a certain extent. Emma dies in order not to go

down to the very bottom of the degradation into which she has fallen, and there is still some nobility about that. Emma and Bovary have some spring left in them. When a spring breaks, it is a proof that such a thing existed. Frédéric does not break, he glides and disappears into nothingness. His old age is purely vegetative. His end will be that of a poor little *bourgeois* of the provinces, events in whose life consist in drawing his little income on one day, on another day having his hair cut or buying a new coat. Even the memory of Mme. Arnoux disappears from his mind or becomes unwelcome; thus in his last conversation with Deslauriers he counts as his only pleasant recollection that of the first awakening of his senses, long before his first meeting with Mme. Arnoux, and suggests that the memory of his whole life is rather painful than otherwise. Men like Frédéric carry within themselves the means of finding nothingness before death. His portrait is well drawn, not in broad touches, but in short, too short, successive strokes; it is clear, solid and consistent, sometimes even not without vigour. Needless to say it is a true portrait, too true.

The secondary characters (save Arnoux,

whom I mentioned above, and who is excellent) are all colourless, almost indistinct and devoid of interest. After closing the book one does not know them very precisely from each other ; one is inclined to confuse Sénécal with Régimbard, or to attribute some of Deslauriers’ words to Hussonnet. They stand in our memory like a confused crowd. M. Dambreuse and Mme. Dambreuse are weakly and indistinctly described. She especially—her disposition, her turn of mind, and the exact reason why she loves Frédéric—everything in her, in fact, is enigmatical without exciting curiosity. The little Roque girl presents for a time a *piquant* and somewhat original silhouette, but she soon becomes blurred and sinks into the shadows. And we do not understand sufficiently, from what we know of her character, why she married Deslauriers and why she afterwards ran away with a singer. All that is confused, and must have been so in Flaubert’s own mind.

After Arnoux, the best secondary character is Deslauriers. He very nearly is a complete, living man, displacing a certain quantity of atmosphere and presenting three dimensions. In Flaubert’s design, he is Frédéric’s antithesis.

He has an ardent will, with the corresponding faults, obstinacy and sudden ill-timed boldness, very little intelligence. He is a sort of Julien Sorel of 1840. Ambitious, envious, unscrupulous, believing in Rastignac, a Republican and a Socialist, partly because of his readings, much more so because of his ambition, he is capable of almost anything in order to reach his ends. He was taught in his youth by poverty whilst Frédéric was taught by comfort and by maternal weakness. He is always saying to Frédéric : ‘ Ah ! if I had your fortune ! with a lever like that . . . ’ Frédéric might answer : ‘ If you had my fortune you would not have your disposition.’ Deslauriers might have made a first-class character ; it seems as if Flaubert had hesitated about him. He did not give him his full scope, and does not even give him the sequence he ought rigorously to have had. He left or put into his character some insufficiently explained contradictions ; here again there is something floating and indistinct. In fact, in *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, Flaubert seems to have lost the secret of the astonishing relief with which the secondary or even third-class characters in *Madame Bovary* stood out before us.

Finally, one of the author’s intentions was to show us a picture of Paris and also of French society in 1840-55. He has not succeeded very well. I must confess that if you question most of his contemporaries on that point they answer, ‘It is quite correct;’ I myself have observed among survivors of that time some of the intellectual habits which he derides in *L’Éducation Sentimentale*. That is true; but, in this case, Flaubert has been betrayed by his peculiar turn of mind which led him to see in things the ridiculous, or rather the grotesque side only. His 1848 is exact but incomplete. It is exclusively a somewhat lively record of all the silly things which were said and thought at that time. It often is *piquant*, and the strong and lively satire of it carries us away; but it narrows the field prodigiously, apparently of set purpose, and that hinders our admiration and even our amusement. We feel as if we were reading a pamphlet when we had wished to read some history, and when it would have been natural to give us a few pages of history whilst keeping to the tone of the novel. Here again, as it happened to Flaubert so often, he has been mistaken as to ‘realism.’ He has mistaken satire for it

because his own turn of mind was satirical. Lyricism is lyricism and satire is satire, but realism is not satire: it stands between the two. A great pictorial novel like *L'Éducation Sentimentale* should in well-chosen places have presented to us a true picture of the opinions of the middle-class in 1840-48; and to be true it should have contained some naïve generosity, some empty lyricism, sincere and candid ignorance, some ridicule, a little that was grotesque and a little that was odious. And Flaubert has only given us—perhaps only seen—a very small portion of that picture. And, having thus expressed what I believe to be a necessary criticism, let me be allowed to give my personal impression as an ordinary reader, and to confess that the historical part of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* amuses me enormously, and that, frankly speaking, I prefer it to the whole of the rest of the book. But my opinion as a critic must stand.

With all its merits mixed with faults of a slight nature, *L'Éducation Sentimentale* is not an interesting book, and it never has conquered the public. Flaubert himself said of it: 'I made a mistake.' What is the cause of that? Scherer said: 'It is because it is badly com-

posed.’ On the whole I am inclined to agree with him. I own that incidents do not command one another, do not *necessitate* one another; that many of them seem stuck in with no particular reason why they should be here instead of there; and that the book gives the impression of being made up of pieces put together with skill but with an obvious skill. It is so, no doubt, and the proof of it is that the interest *does not grow*. That is a sure sign; the interest is kept up but it does not grow. In every book which is not only cleverly constructed but *organised*, in every book which is an organism, in which the *dénouement* is so absolutely the consequence of every incident that it is its final cause, and that the book is as it were engendered by its conclusion—in every such book, I say, the interest is not only kept up but growing and increasing all the time, and that is not the case with *L'Éducation Sentimentale*. I acknowledge all that, but, however, I do not think it can be said, properly speaking, that *L'Éducation* lacks in composition.

The general composition, at least, is quite good. The author follows his principal character, step by step, in his progress towards

annihilation ; he hardly ever drops this thread, and that is the general composition of the work. It is the history of an illusion and a disappointment, or rather of all illusions ending in general disappointment. The plan consists in showing the illusions of youth dropping one by one, and being reduced to one, the illusion of love ; this last, more persistent than the others, falls away in its turn, and the individual, because he was made up of delusions, is finally reduced to pure nothingness. And if you remember the book in its complete sequence you will find that the plan is very thoroughly followed. No, the composition of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* is somewhat loose, but it exists, and though not quite careful enough, it is fairly clever.

The true reason of the undeniable boredom with which this novel inspires us is that the principal person is himself a bore, the author having made a hero of the greatest bore he ever created. Frédéric is the central person, the one *whom we never leave*. Now he is not merely disagreeable, for that would be nothing, but he bores us, he sends us to sleep. He is insignificant in himself, it is part of his character to be so. As soon as we know him, we know of our certain knowledge that he will

never do anything in the least interesting, that it is impossible to him to do so, that fate intends him to be nothing or next to nothing in every circumstance of his life. Now it is to him that we are tied, so to speak, him from whom we cannot get away during six hundred pages. Nothing is to be done, and the greatest talent could not prevail against such an impression. We find ourselves seized by an immense boredom, made up of itself first and then of the expectation of that which awaits us with such a travelling companion.

Do not let us say ‘it should have been . . .’ Do not let us suggest Mme. Arnoux as a principal person, or Deslauriers, or Arnoux. The novel being conceived as it was, Frédéric had necessarily to be the centre of it. The novel is fundamentally a study of a disease of the will in the middle-classes in France; and that being so, Frédéric had to be the centre of it. But then that constituted a fundamental fault in the book, dooming it to be dull. It always will be dull.

The general spirit and intention of the book are less clear than in *Madame Bovary*. Those who hold as essential that there should be no ideas, not even mere suggestions of ideas, in

a novel, but only a picture, and who would say '*Pingitur ad pingendum*,' must be absolutely satisfied with *L'Éducation*. Those who, while hating a 'thesis,' and the obvious intervention of the author into his work with the intention of pleading a cause, yet do not at all dislike that a novel should inspire and suggest a general idea, are less satisfied with *L'Éducation* than with *Bovary*. Seen from this point of view, *L'Éducation* is merely a series of accusations. The general idea which emerges from it is something like this: 'Men of the middle-class, when they are not scoundrels, are fools, and those who are fools are also devoid of moral sense. It is the same for the women, save a few exceptions, of whom I have found a very agreeable one.' Here we have the accusations.

As a matter of fact, all Flaubert's realistic works are of this kind; but sometimes, as in *Bovary*, he goes further than his accusations, and whilst making them, very bitterly too, he also inspires an idea which may be a leading idea, which may be salutary and which at any rate is an idea. '*L'Éducation* may be considered as relatively more moral than *Bovary*, but *Bovary* seems to me more intellectual.

There is one more remark that I should blame myself for not making. It is characteristic of good books that the more we read them the more excellent we find them. I need not say that such is the case with *Madame Bovary*. But I must add that, in a less degree, such is also the case with *L’Éducation Sentimentale*, which is a proof that this is not really a poor book. I never read *L’Éducation* over without thinking it a little better; I have nearly reached the point when it hardly bores me any more. That comes of the fact that the beings created by Flaubert, even when they are not sufficiently alive, are always full, always have a great many thoughts in them, thoughts more or less connected, more or less animated, but numerous. They will bear examination, they will bear meditation, they will even bear that we should see in them what is not there; but that itself is only possible with creations that are already solid, and in literature we can only add to what is already full. I wished to make this observation because it might lead people to read *L’Éducation Sentimentale* once again, and it has that fault that it does not tempt one to read it over again. It is like those persons who improve on acquaintance, but

who do not inspire a desire to become acquainted with them. I am not speaking for the fanatical admirers of *L'Éducation*—for there are some,—I speak for the others who are many. I should like them to say to themselves in Sévère's words, 'And perhaps one day I may know her better,' and I must say that this is the beginning of appreciating it more. On the whole, if Flaubert had not written *Madame Bovary* he would still have written his masterpiece. Every author must have one. And I do not think it would have been *Salammbô*. I think it would have been *L'Éducation Sentimentale*.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REALIST: 'BOUVARD ET PÉCUCHET'

Bouvard et Pécuchet must not be judged too severely, for it is a posthumous and unfinished work; and we may believe, knowing Flaubert's habit of repeated corrections, that he would probably have remodelled it. It should be taken as a last demonstration of Flaubert's disposition and turn of mind. Each of Flaubert's works was the result of one of the tendencies in his temperament. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* was the result of one of his manias, of his essential mania.

Flaubert's essential mania was a horror of stupidity and at the same time a sort of fascination which stupidity exerted over him. He hated it to such an extent that he could not do without contemplating it. It exasperated him, and he needed the exasperation which it produced in him. Sainte-Beuve, as you know, was such a curious man that he preferred to all those souls which were most

different from his own, because they provided his curiosity with more material and with more exciting food, to such a point that he was most interested in what he liked least. A somewhat analogous phenomenon took place in Flaubert's mind, not from curiosity but from rage, and from a desire to satisfy his fury. Human stupidity was for him full of atrocious charm.

Violent temperaments are built in that way. You are a wise man, or almost. You do not like discussions. Consequently when you see one on the horizon, you take your hat and prepare to go. Since you do not like discussions, you avoid them. That is quite logical. But here is a man who, when he sees a discussion coming, excites it heartily, and throws himself wholly into it. You conclude that he likes disputes. Well, that is not so sure. It may be that he hates them, that they make him ill, that he curses and execrates them. Only, whilst hating them, he cannot do without them, because he has an ardent temperament. He loathes them, but he needs them, he needs them to feed his loathing ; he yearns for them in order to proclaim their stupidity ; he wants them in order to confirm and reinforce the horror with which they inspire him ; he

wants them in order to declare furiously that the disputants are idiots. Flaubert, with regard to human stupidity, entertained a similarly complex and somewhat irrational disposition. ‘You do not like fools? leave them alone.’ ‘Indeed! why, I think of them only just to loathe them and to enjoy that loathing to its fullest extent.’ Of a dull poem, J. B. Rousseau said, ‘Let us make it short by not reading it.’ Flaubert would have read it letter by letter, so as to make it longer, and have the more cause for cursing it. It has been said of a so-called moralist who, under the pretext of describing the shame and misery of humanity, has somewhat exaggerated them—‘He went into the Augean stables and made them worse.’ That is exactly what Flaubert did with *bourgeois* stupidity. He hated it so much that he added to it in order to detest it more. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* was born of this passion *for* and *against* human stupidity.

Note that this book so completely represents the result of all Flaubert’s tendencies, or rather of his strongest and most intimate tendencies, that we already see more than the germs of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* in several of Flaubert’s great works. Some *Bouvard* is to be found

in *Madame Bovary*. Homais, Tuvache, Binet are Bouvards. They are people who have a high idea of their own capacities and of the extraordinary importance of that which has the honour of being their work. “You should do some turning,” said Binet. “The talent for it would be necessary,” said Léon. “That is true,” said Binet, bridling. There is some *Bouvard* in *L’Éducation*. All the sociology of the clubs, dinner-tables, or drawing-rooms consists in scientific or philosophical ideas, misunderstood and misinterpreted by fools. There is some *Bouvard* in *La Tentation*. It even happens frequently that *La Tentation* is pure *Bouvard*, a grotesque review of the silly ideas and burlesque beliefs of ancient times, and that certainly is where Flaubert’s satire becomes liveliest. It is natural enough that Flaubert should have ended by conceiving the idea of an epopœia of human stupidity, and attached himself, an attentive and mocking companion, to two fools, in order to follow them through all the ridiculous conceptions which they would go through in the course of their life.

Why two of them ? There is here a memory of Candide and Pangloss, perhaps of Don

Quixote and Sancho; it is well known that Flaubert was a fanatical admirer of both these great books. But the process in Flaubert's hands has become awkward. *Candide* and Pangloss, Don Quixote and Sancho, are opposites; they represent in either book two very different ways of looking out upon the world; they can hold discussions, they do so; this provides the dramatic element which is necessary to a philosophical novel, I should almost say *especially* to a philosophical novel. But Bouvard and Pécuchet are hardly distinct. They show some physical differences and a few very slight moral differences, but intellectually they are one. Now their ideas almost exclusively constitute the subject of the book. The result is that they duplicate and overshadow one another, and that it is provoking to know that there are two of them and yet not to see them as two. We are vexed with them because they both think and say practically the same silly things. We would prefer to see one principal character going through different circles in succession, conversing in succession with different secondary characters and asking each of them for his secret, for *the* secret, thus progressing towards a final disenchantment.

Faust, which, it is true, is not well composed, is arranged in this manner, Mephistopheles soon becoming a secondary character, an acolyte.

As it is, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is the history of a Faust who was an idiot. It was not at all necessary that there should be two. It is also the history of a Frédéric going through intellectual instead of sentimental experiences, and as the story of Frédéric is entitled *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* might be entitled *L'Éducation Intellectuelle*. Now Frédéric is the only principal character in his book; we would hardly expect that there should be two; we might even say that one is more than enough. The duality of Bouvard and Pécuchet is scarcely intelligible. However it may be, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is made up of two parts intermingling with one another: facts and ideas: what Bouvard and Pécuchet do and what they think and learn.

The part which relates to *facts* is insignificant. Bouvard and Pécuchet, who have been clerks until the age of fifty, ruin themselves, needless to say, by attempting agriculture. Bouvard and Pécuchet indulge in elderly love-affairs and are duped, robbed and disappointed; that also could have been foreseen. Bouvard and

Pécuchet, who have a mania for novelties, are looked upon very unfavourably by provincial people; that is but a very simple discovery. From that point of view, there is something puerile about the book. It would seem, save for its obscenities, to have been written for very young readers who look upon the misadventures of travelling fools as upon something new and piquant, and who laugh at them heartily and candidly. It reminds one of *Les Aventures de Robert Robert et de son fidèle compagnon Toussaint Lavenette* or of Töppfer's *albums* deprived of their fantasy and humour. That part of the book is really beneath everything.

The other part is not quite so bad. Bouvard and Pécuchet try to become intellectual and go through an impassioned review of all human knowledge and all human ideas; this promenade among ideas, through civilisation, is not without some interest. But the turn given by Flaubert to that encyclopædia, the road by which he approaches it, is singularly wearisome to us, as it must have been to him. He deals with medicine, history, philosophy, philology, mathematics, astronomy, physiology, and a great deal more; he has read and condensed

a whole library, in order to describe to us the state of mind into which all this reading throws two imbeciles. Think, too, of the state of mind of a man who will read fifteen hundred volumes with the one idea of studying the effect which those fifteen hundred volumes will produce on them who are incapable of understanding them ! Truly it is a kind of aberration.

And yet so it is. Flaubert wished to know everything, not for the sake of knowledge, but in order to realise the brain fatigue induced in a fool by the greed for knowledge ; he wants to understand everything, not for the sake of understanding it, but in order to know how it can be misunderstood. And for this fine result, he condemned himself to a labour of five years, which killed him. It is most extraordinary. And note that this game, while puerile, low, and unworthy of a man, is also extremely dangerous. With this determination to read from the point of view of a man who reads without understanding, one soon reaches that point when one does not understand any more, when one becomes dense on one's own account. One fails to understand, which may happen to anybody ; but as the object is to describe the

sensations of a man who does not understand, instead of persisting and of trying to make out the meaning, one stops there; it is enough, one is satisfied not to understand, and one imagines that it is voluntarily and in accordance with the design followed. But it is really because one could not understand, and the habit is soon acquired of confusing fictitious and intentional dullness with spontaneous dullness.

That certainly happened now and then to Flaubert. He was not supremely intelligent enough to play at that game. A man who looked upon Comte and Proudhon as upon fools could not without some risk dabble with modern ideas and describe how limited men misunderstand them whilst he himself understood them. Thus it happens, not very often, let us be just, but now and then, that in the reader's eyes, the author of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* becomes confused with his two heroes, from whom he is so anxious to be differentiated, and that we say to ourselves: ‘No doubt they do not understand a word of it, but Flaubert himself does not seem to understand much!’ Perhaps it is a punishment for his pride.

It also is one for the spirit of teasing,

so strongly developed in Gustave Flaubert. Though very satirical, Ernest Renan was so good-hearted that, partly seriously and partly for fun, he always wished to find something just, some minimum of truth in those opinions which were most opposed to his own and to reason itself. He could not resist the pleasure or the affectation of finding a little wit in a fool. Flaubert was so malicious that he could not resist the pleasure of finding some stupidity even in a clever man, which of course is always possible. And that is how *Bouvard et Pécuchet* reveals the malicious desire always to show up the stupidity of his characters, even when they have an idea which is half-true, and it is then that the author's common sense does not seem to be quite reliable. And when he turns into ridicule all the ideas which pass before the eyes of his startled heroes, we are led to suspect that the author himself is not so intellectual as he thinks he is.

Again that gives to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as a whole a sort of double aspect which throws our minds into a state of continual uncertainty. Here we have two men who take up studies for which they were utterly unprepared, and who set up a windmill inside

their brains. Very well ; they are fools, that is understood, and there is nothing to say against it. But we then see a procession of all human ideas and knowledge presented in such a guise that it is quite reasonable to think them vain, empty, hypothetical, uncertain and ridiculous ; and the book thereupon assumes the aspect of an act of accusation against human thought itself. And as a matter of fact you may be sure that it really is so, and that Flaubert blames human research for not having succeeded, human science for being obscure, and human thought for having reached no obvious conclusion, and that he is less angry with Bouvard and Pécuchet than against the books they read ; he pities his two heroes even more than he despises them, however great is his contempt for them. Yes, the book is a denunciation of human thought.

Well, let it be so ; I am quite willing to accept this point of view. A book against the thinking being, after Jean Jacques Rousseau, is *à priori* quite acceptable, perhaps even pleasing to my mind. But if that is the meaning of the book, it is badly worked out. Human thought is vain and sterile. It makes Bouvard and Pécuchet mad and wretched and causes

them to end by renouncing and cursing it. Quite so; but they are fools. Therefore nothing is proved. Human thought is not proved to be barren and vain. When Faust renounces in succession first the scientific life, then the sentimental life and the life of artistic contemplation, in order to end by choosing a life of action, he proves something because he is intelligent. The disappointments of Bouvard and of Pécuchet prove nothing. Bouvard and Pécuchet are intoxicated by scientific books as Don Quixote was intoxicated by romances of chivalry, and that is, is it not? the very spirit of the book. Certainly; but Cervantes made of Don Quixote a very intelligent, high-minded, noble-hearted man—a man who is on a very high step in the scale of humanity; and therefore the hurt done to him by novels proves something against novels. But human thought is not convicted of wrong-doing for having made M. Bouvard insane and for having depressed M. Pécuchet.

Thus, seen from any point of view, this novel is a failure, and read in any manner it is wearisome. It occurs to one whilst finishing it that there was here hardly material enough for a short story. A man of the middle-class curses

his profession as a clerk for being beneath his capacity. He comes into a small legacy. He realises his twenty years’ dream of living in the country and enriching his mind. The country bores him. Books make his head ache. ‘I used to be happier.’ And he takes up his old work with pleasure and resumes his post in the office. *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*, and let us believe that the work for which we are intended is that which we are doing, because, if we were not originally made for it, it has gradually moulded us to its measure.

There was nothing more in the subject, and Maupassant would have treated it thus. But it ever was Flaubert’s failing to overweight a subject with insistent repetitions, writing in six pages what only required four. This fault already appears in *Madame Bovary*, and is noticeable in *Salammbô* and in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*. It spoils the ‘three tales’—*Un Cœur Simple*, so true and so touching; *La Légende de Julien l’Hospitalier* and *Herodias*, both marvels of picturesque style; and finally it crushes *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, which could and should have been a pretty tale in Voltaire’s style, alert, merry and incisive. The pre-dominance of Flaubert’s essential mania and

the aggravation of his principal fault mark the inevitable decadence which, in Flaubert, was premature because his critical sense was not very supple, and because, though he was not a very bad judge of his own work when finished, he did not know how to be one whilst he was writing, and he was at that time more complacent over his own faults than over his own qualities. Flaubert did wisely to die before the publication of *Bouvard*, first, because the work had some success due to the death of its author ; then, because it would have been a failure if it had appeared in his lifetime ; and, finally, because Flaubert himself, whose eyes became opened to his works after they were printed, would himself have thought it below his hopes, and would have suffered in proportion with the stupendous effort he had put into it.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT REMAINED OF THE REALIST IN THE
ROMANTICIST AND OF THE ROMANTICIST
IN THE REALIST

WE have seen, and it is a proof of great strength and singular mastery as also of excellent taste, that Flaubert distributed his aptitudes with great firmness, and that, being both a Romanticist and a Realist, he poured his romanticism into certain works and his realism into certain others, trying to avoid any intermingling, and, let us repeat it, succeeding in this almost fully. However, it is impossible to cut oneself in two altogether absolutely, and it would not be a very good thing if one could, as it might only be at the price of a violent and obvious effort. Some romanticism has thus remained in Flaubert's realistic works, and some realism in his romantic works, though in weak proportions, and the combination is not otherwise than agreeable. It is this mixture which it is interesting to examine.

In his romantic works, that which Flaubert conceded to his realistic needs is the minute and precise description of objects. He wished that *Salammbô* should be as flamboyant as an itinerary by Chateaubriand and as precise as an inventory by Balzac. He took enormous trouble to that effect, and I can hardly say whether the effect is a success or a failure. The exact object, exactly described, often assumes in *Salammbô* the appearance of a *bibelot*, and there is rather a superabundance of *bibelots* in *Salammbô*; the poem is thereby made smaller and narrower. And, on the other hand, the only means of carrying us back to a far-away time and of making us live in it is to place before our eyes objects exactly as they were and persons dressed precisely as they would have been. It can even be said that the more distant the time and the place the more obstinately minute must these details be. A house of our own times need not be described, for we can see it though it is not, and it is enough to tell us 'he went into the drawing-room' for us to imagine the hero in his surroundings. On the contrary, it is necessary, in order that we should see *Salammbô* and that we should live with her, that her costume

and surroundings should be clearly and even brilliantly described. All that can be said is that there should be a limit to all things, and that Flaubert has perhaps overstepped it a little.

But taking everything into account, the taste and, so to speak, the needs of realism have not served Flaubert badly in his romantic works. They have given them a certain solidity, a certain consistency, whilst overloading them a little. That may be said of *Herodias* and of *Julien l'Hospitalier* as of *Salammbô*, and if *Saint-Antoine* is less pleasing it is because the very nature of the subject caused Flaubert to be without that resource when writing it, and *Saint-Antoine* was therefore deprived of that ornament and of that strength.

But it is especially Flaubert's romanticism in his realistic works which has to be considered, and there is more romanticism in his realistic works than realism in his romantic books; this may confirm what I have stated, that Flaubert was at heart a romanticist. He has, in his realistic works, made a somewhat curious and piquant use of his romanticism. He has transposed it. He has endowed some of his

characters with it, making of it a ridiculous trait, or a mania, or a failing, slightly modifying it, vulgarising it, lowering it by one degree. That feeling which in him is so sincere that his correspondence is full of it—dreams of the East, aspirations towards distant, luminous or sinister lands, tiger's eyes sparkling in the thicket of a jungle—all this he puts into the mouth, even into the mind of his characters, almost in the same words, with the intention of making it very ridiculous or only slightly so.

Frédéric is half a *bourgeois*, half a poet, and his head is stuffed with Victor Hugo's *Orientales*, Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient*, and M. Méry's Indian novels. 'When he went to the Jardin des Plantes, the sight of a palm-tree carried him away to distant lands. They travelled together on the backs of dromedaries, under the palanquins of elephants, in the cabin of a yacht among blue islands, or side by side on two mules, ornamented with little bells and stumbling in the grasses against broken columns. Sometimes he would stop in the Louvre in front of old pictures; then, his love embracing her even in long past centuries, he substituted her for the persons in the pictures;

he saw her in a high, pointed, mediæval coiffure, praying on her knees behind a lead window ; or else, a great lady of Castile or of Flanders, she sat in a stiff whalebone corslet with gathered trimmings and a starched ruffle. Or she walked down some porphyry staircase, surrounded by senators, under a dais of ostrich feathers, wearing a brocade gown. Sometimes he dreamt of her in yellow silk trousers on the cushions of a harem. . . .’

Flaubert has made of this admirable page an epitome of all kinds of romanticism, that of Chateaubriand, that of Hugo, that of Lamartine, that of Walter Scott, that of the painters of Spain and Italy, his own, in fact all the romanticisms which succeeded each other or which coexisted with one another from 1810 to 1840, bringing them back to the somewhat thin proportions, mean and half-puerile aspect that they must have had in the brain of a vaguely literary *bourgeois* of 1845. And I need not add that I chose this example out of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* because romanticism is less marked in *L'Éducation Sentimentale* than in *Madame Bovary*. Emma, as we have already seen, passes through every phase of romanticism and adopts every aspect of it,

and her inner language is of a constantly romantic form. I say her inner language and not the words which she pronounces, and that is a noteworthy feature. Flaubert would not let Mme. Bovary *speak* like a romantic poet, even a minor one, a writer of romances. He felt that it would not have been real. It is what Emma dreams which takes a romantic form, though an indistinct one, so indistinct that the author has to express it himself; she would be incapable of expressing it in suitable form. A dumb and confused dream of romance dwells in her soul continually, and darkens or enchants it, but her words can only be those of the current language.

It would have been interesting if Flaubert had made her write, and I regret that he should have abstained from doing so. When we are romantic without being literary, we think romantically and we speak as do the common people, but we write in a style which is awkwardly romantic and poetical. Writing is between thought and language, less brilliant than the first, and struggling to get away from words which degrade thought, and to come as near as possible to those thoughts which we look upon as so beautiful. Mme. Bovary's letters

were in an awkwardly ornate and childish poetical style after the manner of Mme. Louise Colet. Why has not Flaubert shown us a few ? They would have completed the portrait and their absence is a lacuna. Nevertheless, he transcribed the inner language of Emma ; and her inner language was Flaubert's romanticism itself, composed as it was of all the romanticisms of the romantic period in France.

Thus Flaubert, a great artist, lent his own romanticism to his characters, lowering it by one degree in order to deride it. He found in doing so, first, the artistic pleasure of transposing his sensations and feelings in order to play with them, to laugh at them and to enjoy them anew, to observe all their shades, degrees and metamorphoses. He also found in it the pleasure of a mocker, who loved raillery enough to enjoy mocking himself, or rather, for self-ridicule was not his favourite passion, he consented to laugh at himself lightly, discreetly, under cover of another's name and personality ; to mock Emma's romanticism meant that he at the same time laughed at his own, and enjoyed pointing out the difference between that of Emma or Frédéric and that of Gustave Flaubert.

• Note, moreover, that while consenting to lend a somewhat ridiculous romanticism to some of his characters, Flaubert yet has too much respect for romanticism to prostitute it. He only lends it, even in an inferior and vulgarised form, to his more attractive characters, such as Emma and Frédéric. He lends it neither to Homais or to Arnoux or to Bouvard or to Pécuchet. Those are out and out *bourgeois*, that is, absolutely odious beings. They could not be infected with romanticism, however bad, however fatal. They are closed to such an invasion. They are absolutely excluded from this still noble manner of feeling. Flaubert, where they are concerned, has refused to utilise the resource of turning his romanticism to some use even in the description of reality.

But, on the whole, we can see that, while firmly holding to the distinction and scrupulously observing the limit between the two styles, Flaubert still allowed himself, in a very just measure and with excellent art, to introduce reality into his romantic work, and to put something of his romanticism, a reflection or an influence of it, into the works given up to the picturing of reality.

CHAPTER X

FLAUBERT AS A WRITER

FLAUBERT is one of the greatest writers in French literature. He became so, first and chiefly, because he had the gift, but also because he willed it, a reason which is not without its weight. No author seems ever to have brought more earnest, more obstinate attention to his style. It was in him an obsession, and this obsession was torture. He had, quite rightly, a great horror of an easy style, and it may be said that, with less reason, he distrusted a natural style. No writer ever deliberately put as great a distance between the style of conversation and that of a work of art. There is no likeness, save on very rare occasions, between the language of his correspondence and that of his novels. The language of his letters is copious, easy, almost purposely careless and trivial, disconnected, overloaded, violent, emphatic and unbridled. That of his novels, without being concise, is careful, corrected,

calculated to such a degree—and in this it becomes a fault—that nothing is ever left to the first flow, the spontaneous vivacity of his thought. It may safely be affirmed that every word has been corrected, erased and rewritten. It is exactly the opposite with Fénelon, Lamartine and George Sand.

He tells us, or his correspondents, that he often spent eight days of violent work in writing out one page. Apart from the exaggeration which was natural to Flaubert, and from a strange delusion of many serious workers who fancy that they have been at work during all the time they have spent in their room, the fact remains that Flaubert used to correct his work, to go through it and to begin it all over again with that sort of morose bitterness which he brought into all things, and which, never allowing him to be satisfied with anything, prevented his being content with his own writing.

He imposed upon himself even unnecessary constraints in order to force himself to an excessive work of style. He would not repeat a word twice in the same page (though he has occasionally done so, and I could almost thank God for it); he would not use two nouns con-

nected with each other by *of*. 'The humid borders of the realms of the winds' in Flaubert's opinion was not correct. There were many other minute, though imperative, rules thus imposed upon himself by Flaubert who attached to them a dogmatic importance.

Above all, he willed that his prose should be submitted to a hidden rhythm, a rhythm that the reader did not perceive, though real and unfailing. In the eighteenth century, it was said that verse should be as beautiful as beautiful prose; Flaubert desired that his prose should be as beautiful as beautiful verse, without ever including a line of poetry properly so-called. For that he had an excellent method which can be recommended to every writer; he read aloud what he had written, carefully listening for any break in the rhythm, any dull sounds or any beating of the words against each other. Maupassant tells us that 'he took up his sheet of paper and raised it to his line of sight, then leaning on his elbow, declaimed it in a slow, incisive voice. He listened for the rhythm of his prose, stopping as if to catch an elusive sonority, combining tones, avoiding alliterations and conscientiously placing his commas like halts on a long road. . . .'

He himself said: 'A phrase can only live when it corresponds to all the necessities of respiration. I know it to be good when it can be read aloud. . . . Badly written sentences do not stand this test; they weigh on your chest, hinder the beating of your heart, and thus *find themselves outside the conditions of life.*' And this is one of the most profound remarks that has ever been made concerning the *organism* of style.

We must own, moreover, that Flaubert needed this strenuous work and incessant watch over his writings. He did not naturally write well. His correspondence is full of errors of syntax, and, as to style properly speaking, is often shockingly faulty. Let me take up one of his letters, quite haphazard, and copy it. I feel sure I shall often be stopped by singular errors of speech. 'Here is the letter for Madame F. I would I were there, in Paris, by you, to efface by a kiss every sad line that would appear on your forehead as you read it; for I fear that you will grieve again about it. I obeyed a *movement to write* to that woman. . . *. There is in the above letter a phrase of which you ask me the meaning: *it is when I tell you* that I am uglier than

I was ! Well, it is quite true. You should have known me ten years ago ; I had a *distinction in my face* which I have lost ; my nose was not so big and my forehead had no lines. There are still moments when I look at myself and *I seem to myself good-looking*, but there are many when I produce on myself the effect of a regular *bourgeois*. . . . Imagination is, I think, a faculty which should be *condensed* in order to give it strength rather than *extended* to give it *length*. . . . That good Toirac, who pleased you by talking of me, is too indulgent or too *illusioned* when he says I know classical antiquity thoroughly. . . . If you have *compliments to relate to me* on my account, I also have some on yours. . . .’

Certainly we all write no better than that, but that is not the style of a great writer, even when letting his pen run loose. Good style and correct language were not *natural* to him, and he had to make great efforts and to keep a strict watch over himself in order to attain them.

It is only fair to add that when he did make the effort it was not in vain. In all his *works* and in every page of his works, Flaubert’s style may be considered as a model, I say a model for

style. His *language* is not *absolutely* pure, for no one can write French without a moment's weakness except those who speak it without a mistake, and I think that Théophile Gautier alone in our century was faultless in that respect. We find in *Madame Bovary* a few Norman idioms and faulty expressions, and a barbarism in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*. There are perhaps in all two dozen such errors, which I own is few, but yet a great deal too many for a writer of his rank. In fact, and taking in every consideration, Flaubert was not absolutely sure of his language.

As for his style, it is always of a high order, and often really wonderful. It is only when Gustave Flaubert ventures to write in abstract style, a thing he hardly ever does, that he shows a slight awkwardness or embarrassment. Being as poor a philosopher as possible, abstract language was to him forbidden ground, and the handling of abstractions an impossibility. We might point to about twenty unfortunate phrases of that kind in the whole of his work. I will only give one here : ' As to the memory of Rodolphe, she had brought it down to the depths of her heart, and it lay there, more solemn and more motionless than a king's

mummy in an underground chamber.' (All this is in concrete style, and excellent.) 'An exhalation escaped from this great embalmed love, which, passing through everything, perfumed with tenderness the atmosphere of immaculation in which she desired to live.' (This is detestable. As concrete style failed him, I know not why, he fell back upon the abstract style which failed him far more.)

Except for this case, which, as I have said, is but rarely encountered, I see nothing that is not admirable, and Flaubert's style is a perpetual feast for the mind. Suitability, exactness, 'the word sticking to the idea,' we find nothing else in every page, in every line.

And what 'formulæ' now and then, though Flaubert with much reason, and always precise rather than concise, hardly ever seeks a short, dry phrase! 'In order to please her, as though she were still living, he adopted her predilections, her ideas; he bought himself some patent leather boots; he acquired the habit of white ties. He put some cosmetic on his moustache; like her, he signed promissory notes. *She corrupted him from beyond the grave.*'

But Flaubert, a romanticist in his heart, a

poet who loves not verse, but who is a poet in the turn of his imagination, chiefly expresses his ideas through images, and that is, so to speak, his characteristic manner. I believe, without being sure of it—for here error is easy and the quest of truth difficult, in fact a critic can hardly proceed otherwise than through intuition—I believe that Flaubert is one of those in whom the image, whether it be a comparison, a metaphor or a symbol, does not appear spontaneously, is not a sensation and not a vision, but who express an idea by an image after having sought the latter with care and with more or less protracted patience. This may be felt, at any rate I think I feel it. Not that he had very clear abstract thoughts—I think I perceived the contrary; but one may have a somewhat confused abstract idea and yet express it by an image, or try successfully to express it by an image.

There are those in whom the image is a sensation, and who think in images, spontaneously, at the first effort; they are pure poets. There are also those who think first in ideas and who begin by expressing the idea in its abstract form, then insensibly translate it by images, strengthening by those images

the idea first expressed in its simple form. French classic writers when gifted with imagination write thus; Bossuet *almost always* did so. Finally there are those to whom the idea first comes in the abstract state but confusedly, and who translate it by an image before having expressed it in abstract form; Flaubert almost always proceeds in this way. 'He no longer found, as formerly, words so soft that they made her weep, or words so vehement that they maddened her; so that their great love, in which her life was plunged, seemed to diminish like the water of a river sinking into its bed, and she caught sight of the mud bottom.'

That is admirable, but evidently not spontaneous: it has been sought for with care; abstract expressions failed Flaubert—and it was just as well—and he wondered how to render the depression and prostration of a weak being suddenly deprived of its support and feeling the delusion which had been made to uphold her falling away from under her.

See again: 'The morrow was for Emma a funereal day. Everything seemed to her wrapped in a black atmosphere which floated confusedly about the outside of things, and grief filled the hollowness of her soul with

gentle howls as does the winter wind in deserted mansions.'

Here the image reveals a very great poet, and is at the same time of an exquisite novelty and of a wonderful exactness; for these 'gentle howls' are truly real and also express the manner in which Emma hears them as well as we ourselves do; she finds a sad charm in her sorrow, and vaguely frames this sorrow in the scene of some romantic ruin. The more we meditate upon this phrase, the more pregnant we find it, with an amazing felicity of attained expression. Here the comparison has the full value of a symbol, that is, of that figure of speech by which a psychological condition is represented, or rather *represents itself*, by a landscape.

And when the image, further reduced, has the value of a psychological formula whilst preserving the vivacity and colour of a rapid vision, I marvel yet more at Flaubert's consummate art: 'Self-distrust embarrasses them; the dread of being distasteful terrifies them; moreover, deep affections are like pure women; they fear to be discovered, and pass through life with downcast eyes.'

Note that here Flaubert *appears* to proceed

like the classics, first stating the idea under its abstract form and then draping it with an image ; but it is not so. The words 'are like pure women' do not apply to 'distrust' and to 'dread.' No, 'distrust' and 'dread' are one idea, 'like pure women' is another, that is the idea of modesty ; and this has not been expressed in the abstract, but by an image straight away, according to Flaubert's usual method. Moreover, this image, clear and rapid as it is, is a charming one.

That is one of the ways in which Flaubert shows himself a poet by his style. There are others. To begin with, he has rediscovered 'numbers,' that is to say, that cadence of words which is absolutely suited to the object, and which pictures it, lets it be felt, introduces it into our mind by the most mysterious, sure and penetrating paths and mingles it with our souls until complete fulness. Some of those descriptive half-pages which Flaubert touched up over and over again, reading them to himself 'in a loud and incisive voice' until he found they entirely satisfied his ear and his mind, may be compared without any disadvantage to some of Lamartine's most exquisite verses. Flaubert knew that exact and significant prose should

always have some rhythm. He asks in his correspondence: 'Why does one always end by writing verse when narrowing down one's thoughts? Whence comes it that *there is a necessary relationship between the right word and the musical word?*'

With such resources, we can suppose how skilled a painter was Gustave Flaubert. He was an incomparable one, and I cannot make up my mind as to whether he was more marvellous in his descriptions of landscapes or in his portraits. But I assert that as a portrait-painter he was superior to Balzac. Balzac multiplies the features too much; one effaces the other and we become confused. I think it is too much to find half a page given up to the nose of M. de Valois, however considerable it might be. I own, however, that Charles Bovary's peaked cap takes up as many lines as M. de Valois's nose, but that strange caprice is unique of its kind. Flaubert paints after the manner of Saint-Simon, in broad and vigorous touches, with less power and less fury, but with more mastery and sobriety.

'The new arrival' was a country lad, about fifteen years of age, and taller than any of us. His hair was cut straight across his forehead like

a village choir-singer's, and he looked sensible and rather embarrassed. Though his shoulders were not broad, his green cloth, black-buttoned jacket seemed too tight round the armholes, and the sleeves revealed red wrists evidently accustomed to be bare. His blue-stockinged legs came out of yellowish trousers tightly drawn up by his braces. He wore strong, ill-blackened shoes garnished with nails.'

Did you notice that the face takes up two lines in this portrait and the clothing six? That is because the face was an insignificant one and the physiognomy sufficiently described by the two words 'sensible and embarrassed,' whilst the accoutrement reveals the social rank, the childhood, education, and even character of Charles Bovary. There is a portrait if you like.

'A man in green leather slippers, somewhat pitted with small-pox, and wearing a velvet cap with a gold tassel, was warming his back against the chimney-piece. His face expressed nothing but self-satisfaction, and he seemed as calm in life as the finch which hung in a wicker cage above his head.'

That is M. Homais. The details of costume reveal the pretentious *bourgeois*; one noticeable

'passport' feature keeps the face in our memory; no other is described; what really matters is the physiognomy, the self-satisfied, self-admiring expression. One comparison seemed to me wrong for a long time; after reflection I have come to see it. M. Homais is calm, but with a light restlessness; he is calm at heart, being sure of himself, but he has little vivacious movements; he is calm while pirouetting on his heels, and he has, to say the least of it, the giddy placidity of a gold-finch.

The portraits—for there are several—of Mme. Bovary are more circumstantial, more minute and quite admirable. They are masterpieces. In fact they smell almost too much of the brush; it would seem that Flaubert had painted them on canvas and then copied them out with his pen. They are of a rare precision and delicacy.

'Her profile was so calm that nothing could be guessed by it. It stood out in the full light in the oval of her bonnet which had pale ribbons like leaves of grass. Her eyes, with their long, curved lashes, looked out straight before her, and though wide open, they seemed a little drawn by her cheek-bones because of the blood which beat gently under her delicate skin. A

rosy tinge coloured the partition of her nose. She hung her head over her shoulder and the pearl edge of her white teeth appeared between her lips.'

Here is another portrait which is astonishing by reason of its difficulty and amazingly successful. It is intended to show by the exterior the modifications brought by intimate sensations and impressions and to show nothing else; the soul is described through the body, the body being in our eyes the reflection and the very portrait of the soul. It seems to me that Flaubert won his mad wager.

'Never was Mme. Bovary so beautiful as at that epoch. She had that indefinable beauty which results from joy, enthusiasm and success, and which is but a harmony between temperament and circumstances. Her desires, her sorrows, some experience of pleasure and her ever youthful illusions had developed her gradually as flowers are developed by manure, winds and sunshine, and she blossomed out at last in the fullness of her nature. Her eyelids seemed designed purposely for the long amorous glances in which her iris disappeared whilst her breath widened her delicate nostrils and raised the full corners of her lips over which

a little dark down made a slight shadow in the light. You would have thought that some artist skilled in corruption had arranged the coils of her hair ; it was rolled in a heavy mass, carelessly, according to the hazards of adultery which uncoiled it every day. Her voice now had softer inflections, her figure also ; something subtle and penetrating emanated even from the folds of her gown and the curve of her foot.'

Another example, quite of a different kind. This is a portrait which, detached from the context, isolated, seems to have no sense, but wait till we have replaced it in its frame.

' Then there alighted from the coach a gentleman dressed in a short frock-coat embroidered in silver, bald over his forehead, a small tuft on the back of his head, sallow-complexioned and of a benevolent appearance. His two eyes, which were prominent and covered with thick lids, were half-closed in order to look upon the crowd, whilst he raised up his pointed nose and made his sunken lips to smile.'

Those features are arranged in singular order ; but remember that this is the portrait of a man alighting from a coach and seen by a crowd. It is first the short embroidered coat

of M. le Conseiller de Préfecture which is seen ; then his forehead which dominates the crowd and attracts attention ; then we notice his complexion, his eyes and his smile. The portrait should not have been otherwise ; we are made to believe that the author was standing in the crowd and saw M. le Conseiller alighting from his carriage. And so he was.

One noticeable thing about Gustave Flaubert's portraits is that sometimes he makes none. It proves his taste. There are cases where it is quite unnecessary to draw the portrait of a character, *even an important one*. That is when his soul is insignificant. We have of Rodolphe no portrait, but these words : ' She perceived a gentleman in a green velvet riding-coat. He wore yellow gloves though he had on heavy gaiters.' We have no portrait of Léon. ' A fair-haired young man.' That is all. The fair hair was indispensable but the rest was unnecessary. No portrait of Frédéric. ' A young man of eighteen, with long hair, carrying an album under his arm.' That is all. And indeed what would be the good of describing the faces of Frédéric or of Léon ? You may be sure that they were quite ordinary, they cannot have had any physiognomy. I

regret, however, that Rodolphe was not described a little; his thick moustache or his abundant and well-kept whiskers, his prominent eyes and conceited, somewhat heavy air might have been indicated. But Flaubert shows his contempt for his 'lovers' by pretending not to remember their seductive features.

Flaubert's landscapes are precise hallucinations. They are of an absolute reality, and show that relief, that strong standing out of angles and contours that objects in our dreams sometimes assume suddenly against the black curtain of sleep. How is it done? Very probably from notes taken in Egypt, in Tunis, in Normandy, and revived by the strength of memory, the intensity of imagination, the passionate quest of style, and especially an ardent love of living matter and brilliant forms.

'A golden dust floats in space, *so fine as to be confused with the vibrations of light*. . . . Under the gusts of the wind, drifts of sand, like great winding-sheets, arise and then fall again. Suddenly a flight of birds passes across a patch of light, forming a triangular battalion like a sheet of metal of which only the edges vibrate.'

Since Chateaubriand no one had known how to paint natural things with that prodigious

clearness, that wonderful adaptation of the word to the object. Marvellous *invention* is necessary in order to see so correctly. And see each different process. Here is a consecutive, homogeneous description, the *dramatis personæ* seeing the picture described by the author: 'The round, purple moon was rising from the ground level, at the bottom of the meadow. It was rising quickly between the branches of the poplars which hid it in places like a black, torn curtain. Presently it appeared, dazzling in its whiteness, in the empty sky, lighting it up, and then, slackening its course, it dropped on the river a great patch, which broke up into a quantity of stars. And this silver light seemed to reach the bottom in its contortions, like a headless serpent covered with luminous scales.'

And now here is a description made up of scattered features because the character who gave the author occasion to write it was not looking at the picture but dreaming of it, remembering it, and in her dream some special features, isolated and disconnected, occurred haphazard to her mind. •

'The writing had been dried with some ashes from the hearth, for a little grey dust fell

from the letter on to her dress, and she almost thought she saw her father leaning over the fire to take hold of the tongs. What a long time it was since she no longer sat near him, on the stool inside the chimney, burning the end of a stick in the great flame of the crackling rushes. She remembered some summer evenings full of sunshine. The colts whinnied when any one passed, and galloped, galloped! Under the window there was a bee-hive, and sometimes the bees, flying around in the light, struck the window-panes like bounding golden balls. . . .’

The picture is not complete; it had no need to be so; but, free as he was to choose the isolated features which are supposed to come back to Emma’s mind, the poet, whilst apparently jotting them down haphazard, has succeeded in giving a complete sensation of life at the farm, joyous, gentle, full of innocence and of the light and careless gaiety of things.

And the most admirable of all Flaubert’s style effects is that the *key* is infallibly in tune. The key changes continually, especially in *Madame Bovary*, elsewhere there is an occasional feeling of monotony, and it is always true, always precisely appropriate to the object, circumstances and characters. The author is

aware that he possesses this art in an extraordinary degree, and he does not dislike to show it off, marking it by some oppositions which produce excellent effects. I do not speak of the inter-crossing of the official speeches of the 'Comices' and of Emma's and Rodolphe's loving words, where the process, without being shocking, is really a little too marked; but read the two pages opposed to each other which describe the dream of Charles and the dream of Emma, and see how each brings out the other, how each has its particular style, and how strong a sensation is produced in our mind by this contrast.

'When he came home in the middle of the night he did not dare to wake her. The china night-light drew a trembling circle of light on the ceiling, and the closed curtains of the little cradle formed a sort of white hut standing out in the shadow by the bed. Charles looked at them. He thought he could hear his child's light breath. She would soon grow up; each season would quickly bring fresh progress with it. He could already see *her coming back from school at night-fall, laughing merrily, her pinafore ink-stained and her basket hanging on her arm*; then she would have to go to a boarding-

school ; *it would cost a lot ;* how was it to be done ? Then he reflected. *He thought they might take a small farm in the neighbourhood which he might himself look after in the mornings, as he went to see his patients.* He would economise the income from it ; he would invest it in the Savings Bank ; later he would buy some shares, anywhere. . . . How pretty she would be at fifteen, like her mother ; she too would wear big straw hats in the summer ! . . . *He could imagine her in the evenings, working with them in the lamplight ; she would embroider some slippers for him ; she would help with the house-work.* . . . '

' Emma was not asleep ; she pretended to be ; and whilst he fell asleep at her side, she awoke to other dreams. She was being carried away by four galloping horses, travelling since eight days, towards a new country whence they would never return. They went, their arms locked, without speaking. Often from the summit of a mountain, they suddenly perceived some splendid city with domes, bridges, ships, forests of lemon trees and white marble cathedrals with storks' nests in their pointed steeples. The horses went slowly because of the slippery marble pavement, and on the

ground lay bunches of flowers which were offered by women dressed in red corsets. Then one evening they reached a fishing village, brown nets drying in the sun, along the cliffs, near the huts. They would stay and live there; they would inhabit a low house with a flat roof, under the shade of a palm-tree, in the curve of a bay, by the sea. They would go out in a gondola, they would swing in hammocks; and their life would be large and ample like their silk garments, warm and starry like the soft nights which they would gaze upon. *However, in the immensity of this future which she evoked, nothing particular emerged; the days, all of them magnificent, were similar like waves, and the whole swung gently on the horizon, infinite, harmonious, all blue in the sunshine.* But the child coughed in her cradle or else Bovary snored more loudly, and Emma did not sleep until dawn. . . .'

This is indeed writing; this is finding the style suitable to each object, each place, each circumstance, each being; and this is picturing through differences and oppositions of tone the deep and eternal discords* which render beings impenetrable to each other, as far away from each other, in the light of the same candle, as

if an abyss opened between them. Flaubert is indeed the master of what has been called the artistic style—the style which paints, which engraves, and the style which sings, which whispers and which growls; a style which renders sounds as well as objects and with an equal force of impression.

And he has none of the faults of those who have imitated him and claimed to follow him. He does not write with his nerves; he is not abrupt, broken, hissing or jog-trotting. His phrase remains rhythmical, strongly organised, full and sound, whatever it expresses or describes. It has nothing morbid. In that he is as classical as Chateaubriand and shall remain as such in literary history. He is eminently worthy of being studied and may be studied with no danger; for he has no fault, no literary tricks, and it is possible to study him without being induced to imitation, for imitation only applies to faults and tricks. An admirable writer, born to be one, for he was capable of making efforts and of effacing the traces of his efforts; the books at which he worked most desperately are precisely those in which the labour, though not absolutely invisible, is least noticed at the first reading.

CHAPTER XI

THE FATE OF HIS WORKS

It now remains to examine what was the fate of Flaubert's work throughout mankind before and after the author's death.

The first effect produced by *Madame Bovary* was astonishment and scandal, and, taking everything into account, the book was not understood, as happens with all powerfully original books. That is not to say that the renascence of realism in France dates from 1857. It existed and *had been noticed* since 1850 or so. It was *à propos* of the works of the estimable Champfleury that the word became in use in the literary world and in the public. In 1851 the *Revue des Deux Mondes* thus defined the art of Champfleury : ' By their strange subjects(?) the *Contes* of Champfleury belong also to the school of Victor Hugo, but the author draws away from it by the serious care which he brings to the description of objects and of persons. . . . He is the realist of fan-

tasy (this definition arose too soon ; 'if it had waited a little, it would have found the Goncourts, to whom it would have applied exactly). The school of imagery and of pure fantasy succumbs after having dethroned the classical school, and realistic art in its turn seems to be making ready to receive the heritage of childishly picturesque art.'

Murger himself had been dubbed a realist in 1851 because of his *Scènes de la vie de jeunesse*. Add to this that in 1858 the *Gabrielle* of Augier inaugurated on the stage *bourgeois* realism and the reaction against the ideas, conceptions, tendencies and influences of romanticism. Again, add that in 1853 there appeared a complete edition of Stendhal's works which had a great vogue, a great influence especially. Pure realists, those who professed that the romantic element should be entirely eliminated from a novel, opposed Stendhal to Balzac and held up Stendhal as the leader of a school.

Therefore, already in 1850, realism existed and was acknowledged as such, and expected to bury romanticism.

Only, it was not clearly noticed at once that *Madame Bovary* was the great expected realistic

work, that which was to be the final model. It was taken at first for a pornographic work. The cause of this was, first, a few details rather too vivid for the period; then also the fact that minds at that time were turned in that direction and preoccupied with that question, either to enjoy or to deplore it. Without speaking of the *Mémoires de Colette Mogador*, which it is, however, not idle to mention, for they had fabulous success, remember that *La Dame aux Camélias* and *La Dame aux Perles* date from that time, as also do the impassioned studies of Cousin on women of the seventeenth century, and the complacent and numerous studies by Sainte-Beuve on celebrated women of the last three centuries. Literature from 1850 to 1860, before Michelet's gynæcological books, already foreshadowed in his historical works, was essentially feminist. Now, as people were accustomed to find the sexual question everywhere, that only was noticed in *Madame Bovary*, and the austere, even misogynist meaning of the great book was unperceived.

Hence the famous lawsuit of 1857 and hence the distrust of established critics. Sainte-Beuve, it is true, who was rarely mistaken, was

very favourable to the work, and only accorded to *bourgeois* susceptibilities and to his own tendencies one half-page in which he expressed the regret that there should not be one good man, one high-minded person in the whole of the book. But the *Revue des Deux Mondes* took up the tone of 'persiflage': 'The author seizes upon the outside of things without reaching the depths of moral life. . . . The adventure is not a poetical one. It proves that there is some danger to a woman of the provinces in making debts and in pursuing the ideal by means of *l'Hirondelle*, a public vehicle which journeys between Yonville and Rouen. . . .'

Cuvillier-Fleury, in the *Journal des Débats*, showed himself hard and devoid of penetration. Obeying to the preoccupation, a quite respectable one, that we have mentioned, and looking upon the book as a simple study in libertinage, he wondered what interest it could offer. 'Mme. Bovary is a born courtesan (precisely what she was not), and the morality of the work is that a courtesan can be but a courtesan.' He blamed the excess of minute details, when it is not the number but the choice of minute details which should be considered, and this

criticism which was to become true when applied to *L'Éducation* was not so when applied to *Bovary*. 'People say it has style in its favour,' added Cuvillier-Fleury. 'If it has, let us accept it; for if you take away the style from *Phèdre* you have *Messaline* (again a profound error), and not even Juvenal's *Messaline*. Take away the style from *Manon Lescaut* (the style of *Manon Lescaut*! and he thinks that of *Madame Bovary* bad!) and you have the story of any wench.' But, according to this critic, the truth was that *Madame Bovary* was not well written, and that Flaubert's process consists in draping the most vulgar, realistic observations with the purple of romanticism. That is not altogether untrue. The Aristarchus concluded thus: 'And yet I like Champfleury's photographs better than Flaubert's painted lay-figures, *Les Aventures de Marinette* better than *Madame Bovary*. Realism is not much, but it is less than nothing when dressed up in the rags of romanticism. There lies M. Flaubert's stumbling-block.' Short sight is here no less evident than ill-humour.

It must be known that it was the public who made the success of *Madame Bovary* and who gradually imposed Flaubert upon the critics.

In the meanwhile, a literary event took place the following year which almost ruined the destinies of Flaubert, and which at any rate traversed them. *Fanny*, by Ernest Feydeau, appeared and produced a very deep impression. Sainte-Beuve hailed the book as a masterpiece, and, in the course of a long article, placed it in a perpetual parallel with *Adolphe*, without giving *Adolphe* the preference. As a matter of fact, *Fanny* was very much discussed. Rigault, in the *Journal des Débats*, denounced the mannerisms of the style whilst praising the precision of the analysis, and saw in Feydeau an imitator of Flaubert. *La Revue des Deux Mondes* gave two long articles in succession *à propos* of *Fanny*—one by Lataye, a very mediocre one; and one by Montégut, which was ingenious but rather singular. It was a novelty then, which may well astonish us now, to represent the lover as being jealous of the husband, and that novelty surprised Montégut so much that he almost declared the thing impossible. ‘It is a particular case, a freak of the heart, not an ordinary incident in adulterous loves. Since Fanny accepts Roger for her lover, it must be because she loves him better than her husband; and since he is the loved one, *what*

reason can he have for being jealous? . . . Roger's jealousy is therefore a special, irrational and eccentric case.' It is difficult to reason in a more ingenuous manner. But we can see by Sainte-Beuve's admiration, by the many discussions raised around *Fanny*, by Cousin's exclamation, reported by Sainte-Beuve, '*Fanny's* success! don't talk to me about it!' that the noise produced by Feydeau's work was immense and my own recollections agree with all this testimony.

This success prevented for a time that of *Madame Bovary*. *Fanny* was looked upon as the great realistic work which had been expected and Feydeau as the founder of realism; in fact Feydeau almost became Flaubert's Amerigo Vespucci. Presently, prejudice disappeared; *Fanny* declined in men's minds because it was merely a psychological novel, penetrating enough, but without breadth, and by no means a realistic novel, that is, a picture of manners and customs. *Madame Bovary* rose gradually, new generations of readers perceiving that since *Le Rouge et le Noir*, no book had been brought to light that was more substantial, fuller or more complete, and that, as to the art of writing, the superiority of

Madame Bovary over *Le Rouge et le Noir* was obvious.

Thus we see that from the moment when the realistic school, constituted at last, produced its important works, *Madame Bovary*, far from being overshadowed, was, so to speak, held up by them as by a pedestal and towered above them all. It was *à propos* of Alphonse Daudet's *Fromont jeune et Risler aîné* that Montégut admitted that he perceived the historical importance of *Madame Bovary*, and saw in this work the real starting-point of a whole epoch of literary history, in fact a founder's book—'a book which dates, not only in the history of literature, but in the moral history of the nation,' for '*Madame Bovary* has really been to false ideals made the fashion by romanticist literature, what *Don Quixote* was to the chivalry mania, and what *Les Précieuses Ridicules* were to the influence of the Hôtel Rambouillet' (1876). At last the real meaning of the work was found, and also the formula, true though incomplete, which was to be attached to it.

The most general opinion, from 1865 or so until Flaubert's death, a time of which I can call myself a witness, was that Flaubert was a marvellous, unrivalled realist, called to realism

by an imperious vocation, only really successful in that art, and who, now and then, from sheer dilettantism, attempted a romantic work, a work of imagination, produced it with immense efforts and no pleasure and only with partial success. It was rather the contrary which was true, and his *Correspondance* revealed later on that it was to works of imagination that Flaubert worked with the greatest joy, his real vocation being that of a romanticist. But it must be allowed that it was easy to mistake him.

Moreover, he was universally admired, and even popular. His characters, who were not types, as I have tried to prove, *became* types, first because they were life-like, and then because of that simplification that the public inflicts on the characters which are well enough known to become part of the times. People said an Emma Bovary, a Bovary, a Bournisien, a Madame Arnoux, a Frédéric Moreau; they said above all a Homais, and I think that will always be said, partly because the man as painted by Flaubert is marvellously real and partly because, reduced to the condition of a type, he is eternal. •

We must note in this connection that fame is a kind of deformation. It magnifies the

characters that writers have drawn from their brains, but it alters them. What we now call a Madame Bovary is not an Emma in the least, is worth a great deal less than Emma, and would never take poison ; the women that we call Bovarys never die as long as they can help it. What we call a Bovary is a man who has all the obtuseness of Flaubert's character without his delicacy, which, under the thick exterior, is nevertheless real and even touching. The priest we call a Bournisien is not the man who works with the haymakers in a storm in order to save the poor goods of his parishioners and keep them from ruin. The chemist we call a Homais is not unlike Flaubert's ; yet Flaubert's Homais has some literary and artistic pretensions that ' a Homais ' is often without. And so on. It remains that a character in a novel must be very great and very strong if it contains enough general truth to *produce a type* ; it also remains that a really great character in a novel must contain at the same time enough general truth to produce a type, and enough particular features, also true, to live a minutely circumstantial life ; it remains, too, that we experience infinite pleasure when, from the type born of popular simplification which

is known to us by conversations, we come or we return to the character which produced it, and we see how much richer is the latter, how much more abundant and complete, how, while keeping up the general aspect, he towers above the popular type which has taken his name ; and it remains, finally, that all these things are true of Flaubert's characters.

At the time of Flaubert's death, and afterwards when his *Correspondance* was published, two articles by M. Brunetière appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which, apart from the author's talent, marked most exactly, it seemed to me, the average opinion of the reading public concerning Flaubert at that time. The critic defined Flaubert as a pure artist, that is a man for whom Art was an end and not a means, in fact the end of all things whatever they be. He quoted the following, by Flaubert himself : ' The accidents of the world, as soon as they are perceived, appear to one as being transposed for the use of an illusion to be described ; so much so that all things, including one's existence, seem to have no other utility.' And he pointed to the near kinship which exists in that respect between Flaubert and Théophile Gautier. . He saw in Flaubert a describer,

a painter, very sure, very exact, and admirably served by his profound knowledge of his language and the patient art of his style, without, however, according to him a full and absolute originality. He thought Flaubert occasionally imitated Chateaubriand, and quoted passages of both writers including similar metaphors. He congratulated Flaubert on having restored numbers and cadence to French prose, which had been the more neglected because poets seemed to have monopolised the science of rhythm. He placed *Madame Bovary* and *L'Éducation Sentimentale* above all the other works of Flaubert, and placed *Madame Bovary* above *L'Éducation*, remarking that the interest is scattered in *L'Éducation* but concentrated in *Bovary*, and that when Flaubert asserts that there is not one isolated and gratuitous description in *Salammbô* it is of *Madame Bovary* that he might rightly say it. Finally he noted in *all* Flaubert's works that *bourgeois* hatred of the *bourgeois* which ends by spreading itself out in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, a *bourgeois* feeling indeed, for it is a mean one, if we are, like Flaubert, to call *bourgeois* 'every low manner of thinking.'

Concerning the *Correspondance*, the critic

fully approved of the theory of impersonal literature ; he quoted as being right this axiom of Flaubert's: 'If a reader does not draw from a book the moral which it contains, it is either because the reader is stupid or because the book is wrong.' And he added, further, that 'works of art are placed all the higher in the heavens of art that they are less enlightening concerning the author's personality.' He returned, moreover, with sorrow, to that strange idiosyncrasy, that phenomenon of the artist devouring the man in such a way that 'Flaubert only understood in the world what might, as he said, "be used for his personal consumption" 'that is for his art and, so to speak, for his trade.'

Since the death of Flaubert, his renown has done nothing but grow, and it seems as if time would never touch it. He is universally admired, howbeit in diverse ways, as it always happens, here for some of his works and there for certain others, this or that book being excluded or despised.

From 1881 to 1890 or so, it was perhaps *Bouvard et Pécuchet* which was, not the most popular, but the most exalted by noisy admirers. The young men of that time, more

or less deeply imbued with pessimistic theories, saw in this book, together with the ferocious slaying of the *bourgeois* which they enjoyed, a demonstration of the inanity of knowledge, research and thought, and also certain Nihilist tendencies which do appear here and there in the book. This group seems to me to be less numerous nowadays, but it still exists.

Others, that is artists, men of refined taste, or who think they have refined taste, and wish others to think so, or who simply use the now common-place method of admiring what is least appreciated by the crowd in order to attain a false air of originality, place *Salammbô* and still more *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* very high on the scale. 'There is the real Flaubert,' they say, and they accord to *Madame Bovary* a *succès d'estime*, calling it 'Flaubert at his trade.' This group is fairly considerable. Those of its members who are sincere are no other than belated romanticists for whom the realistic movement has never existed, or who have a natural feeling of dislike towards it which is perfectly legitimate.

Finally, for the great public of the present time, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is but a curiosity; *La Tentation* and *Salammbô* very laborious

works of art and exercises in style, of which only a few fragments need be preserved; *L'Éducation Sentimentale* a picture of manners and customs, rather confused and hard to read, but worthy to be read from beginning to end; and *Madame Bovary* a masterpiece, the novel of the century, a book which would almost enable us to dispense with all the novels of manners and customs which followed it, an inexhaustible book to be read and re-read over and over again.

The influence of Flaubert has been exclusively literary, for indeed the author was incapable of general ideas; but, as a literary influence, it has been immense. The whole realistic school arises from him and all the romanticist literature of the second half of the nineteenth century belongs to the realistic school. Without mentioning lesser names, the two Goncourts, Alphonse Daudet and Émile Zola are disciples of Flaubert, and have always proclaimed themselves such. They all start from observation, do not admit that in writing one should follow imagination or even those confused memories which remain from unconscious observations lying at the bottom of our minds and probably altered by being mixed with our own substance.

For them, everything that we put in our novels has to be taken from life and *noted down* at the very time when it was taken, so as to pass into our writings without any deformation and with a simple act of arrangement, co-ordination, disposition and composition.

They also insist, like Flaubert, that literature must be impersonal, and that, if it is impossible that art should not be 'nature seen through a temperament,' that temperament should not intervene more than is absolutely unavoidable, and that it should never be called in or heard unconsciously. The author must not speak, but as the facts have to speak through his mouth, that fact already sufficiently alters their nature, and they should not be further disfigured. In all this those writers show themselves to be very faithful disciples of Flaubert.

Of course, in spite of this fidelity to their master's doctrines, they yet differ very much from him and from each other.

The Goncourts are like Flaubert, but with an invincible tendency to apply their very scrupulous and minute observation to exceptional characters only, to such an extent that though their methods are realistic their general

turn of mind is not, since realism consists in the exact description of the average humanity.

Alphonse Daudet is like Flaubert, with a continual inclination not towards the exceptional but towards the minute, curious or anecdotic detail, in such a way that, though a true and very penetrating realist, his works, which our descendants will find full of documents on the Second Empire and the Third Republic, will be considered more as historical documents than as human documents, and that he will be read more as a lesser Saint-Simon than as a *Le Sage*.

Émile Zola is like Flaubert without the power of reflection over the materials furnished by attentive observation. His observation is attentive, but Flaubert used to gather it up, to concentrate and vivify it through that inner power which, bringing thought to bear upon things seen, renders the knowledge of them more precise and more exact; and it is this power, as also the psychological sense, which Émile Zola lacks. This reflective power is replaced in him by a sort of imagination, of coarsening vision, which makes him remember things seen not exactly as they were, but larger, more highly coloured and more for-

midable ; therefore Zola, a realist and a conscientious and hard-working one, at the beginning of his work, became, as he went on, a romanticist, almost fantastic and certainly immoderate and intemperate, a fact, it is true, which was the cause of his success. Yonville or Tostes described by him would have assumed the aspect and proportions of an epic city, however careful and patient his previous notes on Tostes or Yonville. The strict and diligent partition which Flaubert had made between his different tendencies and the different resources of his talent, so as not to make one character of Salammbô and of Emma Bovary, is precisely what Zola, also born a romantico-realist, knew not how to do. Or rather, being a born romanticist like Flaubert and more so, Zola, through his admiration for the master and obeying the doctrines of his school, made an immense effort to be a realist and only partially succeeded. Nothing gives us a truer measure of the influence of Gustave Flaubert than that forcible attempt by a writer to eliminate what he himself called 'the romanticist views' and that struggle against his whole nature in order to remain worthy of the leader, in order not to go back upon the

step made by the master and considered as decisive and irrevocable. •

These three protagonists of the modern novel also as writers felt the influence of the author of *Madame Bovary*. Neither of them allowed his style to be easy, smooth and flowing, one might almost say, to be simple, and that, merely because Flaubert's was neither. The one semi-quality, the one charm which Flaubert did not have was negligence, 'nonchalance,' and its pleasing artifice or its pleasing naturalness. Flaubert does not converse like George Sand, like Le Sage, like Voltaire himself even, after a fashion. That is part of his system, part of the doctrine of impersonal literature. To converse requires some *abandon*; it means that the author is allowed to intervene, if not by the expression of his personal sentiments, at least *by his tone*, by the accent of his voice, so to speak. Hence the careful, well-kept-in-hand, if not somewhat strained style in which Flaubert wrote his books.

Likewise, the two Goncourts, Alphonse Daudet and Émile Zola refused to be simple.

Zola swells and works up his effects with a rather remarkable gift of unsuitability but also with some estimable effects of force and relief ;

simplicity, ease and naturalness are lacking or have been avoided by him as far as possible, and his wide reputation as a writer has come to him chiefly on that account.

Daudet, infinitely more gifted as a writer (and in that he is rather a disciple of Michelet and of Saint-Simon than of Flaubert), had a natural disposition to write with his nerves, in a vibrating, jerky and disconnected style which seems made up of short, shooting flames or of sudden electric sparks. But if this style, originally natural to him, was diligently cultivated by him, turned into a personal peculiarity and brought with extreme care to the special perfection which it demanded, we may well believe that the enormous importance attached to style by Flaubert went very far in inspiring Alphonse Daudet with this pre-occupation. After Flaubert, no novelist was allowed not to be a writer, an original writer, and each tried to add to his little grain of personal originality all the laborious originality to which he might attain.

Lastly, the Goncourt brothers, so different from Flaubert as writers, and so inferior to him, are nevertheless most undeniably his very attentive pupils. 'Artistic writing,' which is

how they define their own style, is a style which claims to be descriptive, which—without being the ‘poetical prose’ of 1810, which on the contrary is accused of being nothing but the conventional language of poets, without the rhythm—claims to express, as well as verse can, the colour, design, relief, movement even, of things and of beings, to rival with things and even with beings in its free, spontaneous, irregular and capricious life, through a particular, personal and original rhythm, ever invented, ever created, ever new, by a spontaneous and unceasingly varied design, eternally suited to the things which it describes.

Of this style, two models doubtless exist, by Gautier in his prose works and by Flaubert. But for this school, Gautier is still too much of the rhymester who, in his prose, preserves the habits of the verse-writer. Flaubert is the real model to follow, and also to overtake; for it has been one of the Goncourts’ mistakes to think that they might leave to Flaubert, as a proof of timidity, respect for traditional syntax and the feeling of numbers and cadence, and that one might depend entirely upon that instinct or rather that quest for the pictorial style, the pulsating style, the style which

proceeds by sudden and acute sensations inspired to the reader. This quest leads to continuous quaintness, to constant strangeness and to perpetual eccentricity, than which there is no more painful monotony, and to the frequent production of gratuitous effects of style which paint nothing, express nothing, and answer to nothing but to the author's desire to produce an effect of style. Flaubert never fell a prey to such childishness, but the Goncourts are not quite free from it.

Yet, however far below Flaubert these distinguished writers have remained, and whatever faults unknown to him do their works reveal, his influence on them was a considerable one ; all his tendencies reappear in them ; they have attempted all that he dreamt to realise, and either in their conceptions or in their style not one of them would have become what he did without Flaubert. The whole of the realistic novel was born of *Madame Bovary* and was nourished and educated in its early youth by *L'Éducation Sentimentale*.

The moral influence of Flaubert, like every moral influence, is extremely difficult to measure and to define. It is undeniable that some part of his soul, too, passed into ours, since

some of his characters have become types, which means that a part of his soul has become proverbial. It seems to me, judging by a sort of intuition, any precise method of interrogation being impossible in this case, that his influence has been good rather than bad.

Whilst being absolutely persuaded that it is abominably untrue to say as some people do that a beautiful book is always good, yet I think it must be acknowledged that a beautiful book has in itself a particular virtue which consists in turning the mind, at least for a while, from low, vulgar and frivolous ideas, and filling it with the idea of the beautiful, an æsthetic feeling.

But if we take Flaubert's books in what they contain, and not for the manner in which they are executed, they do not appear to me, even on that score, as acting a bad part in the work of civilisation. They do not recommend any one virtue, they describe none, or almost none; they never take or hold any moral office; all that is true; but they are exact, clear-sighted, precise and satirical. Now insight, precision, truth in one word, are in themselves sound things; we will speak of satire presently.

Flaubert was very true. It is an exaggera-

tion to say that his books contain but scoundrels and fools. People forget Mme. Arnoux, old Rouault, the old servant of the 'Comices,' Justin and even Bovary's mother. There are in Flaubert's books some good, rather limited souls, scattered here and there in a world of scoundrels and of fools. In what proportions? In a proportion which is perhaps smaller than the reality, for I preserve the hope that Flaubert has not seen quite as many good souls as there really are.

Note, moreover, that Flaubert's antipathetic characters are much more often fools than scoundrels, and therein lies Flaubert's profound truth. He had to describe the lower middle-class. Ineptitude, vanity, selfishness, not of a ferocious but a prudent kind, an attentive, somewhat cowardly selfishness, a weak moral sense, a complete absence of ideals, a heavy, gaping stupidity, that is what he shows us. There is some perversity, some rascality, but in very weak proportions, which is again true to life. Arnoux is perhaps the worst scoundrel amongst his characters, and Arnoux is rather unconscious than perverse. He has no moral sense, but he is not malicious, and has even a sort of good-nature; the kindness

which requires no effort and which is but an instinct and yet a good instinct. The great scoundrels or perverse monsters of Balzac are unknown to Gustave Flaubert. He does not know them ; he has never seen them ; that is because he is a good realist, a man who really, like Le Sage, sees only average humanity, because he is true. Truth has ever been one of Flaubert's muses, she who has ever taken precedence before all others.

Now is truth a sound and salutary thing? I believe it is. It is strange that we should congratulate preachers on drawing up lively and penetrating pictures of humanity's errors, and that we should hesitate to praise those novelists who offer us the same pictures. We must not be afraid to hold a mirror up before human vices and stupidity, especially before stupidity ; for the description of vices is not without some danger, and that of stupidity may be useful without offering, I think, the least danger. Now it is mostly human stupidity which is pictured by Flaubert. Men should constantly be recalled to the contemplation of their own meanness and misery ; there is some chance perhaps that it may incline their minds and souls to better habits.

Bossuet will answer to this, not without some depth of thought, that this again is but vanity and amusement. 'Man, curious of spectacular shows, has made one out for himself from his own ridicules and his own errors.' No doubt, but it is also by this show that you yourselves begin in order to correct it. The sincere novelist begins as you do and leaves off whilst you continue. As a Christian once said to La Rochefoucauld, 'Where you finish, Christianity begins,' so it may be said of the novelist who faithfully describes human life that he writes one-half of the page and leaves to the moralist or to the preacher the task of finishing it. But the moralist or the preacher needed that first half of the page; he had either to write it himself or to leave it to the novelist to write it; therefore it is good and part of a useful work.

It is true that it was probably not in view of the second half of the page that Flaubert wrote the first. It is true that he seems to have spoken of men's errors with the single intention of mocking them cruelly. It is true that Flaubert's tone is almost continually satirical, and it remains to ask whether satire is a good use to make of talent. It

certainly reveals a soul who is not kindly, who is soured, who is deeply wounded by the moral misery of humanity, and who writes not in order to cure them but to take revenge upon them. If one could choose one's own talent it would be a serious thing to choose the satirical style, and if one could choose one's temper it would be culpable to choose the inclination to evil speaking; but yet satire, like Molière's satirical comedy, which is but a variety of it, is of such immense social importance that it would be regrettable, though worthy of all respect, that a scruple should prevent those who have the gift for it to indulge in it. They are the salt of the earth; they do not keep it from corruption, but without them the corruption would probably be greater still. Men, when they are criticised, do not mend their ways; but we can always say like La Bruyère, 'that they would perhaps be worse if censors and critics were lacking,' and 'that is why people preach and write,' and we must own that this is not improbable.

It is enough, and that is indeed the touchstone, that, in the picture given us of human imperfections, a care should be shown not to

go beyond truth and a sense of due proportion should be observed. This sense is a moral instinct as well as a literary tact. To a private person who speaks of private persons neither slander nor evil-speaking is allowed. To a writer who only speaks of man in general evil-speaking is permitted and slander is forbidden. That is the limit. Flaubert, in spite of his harsh humour, has not overstepped it, though he came very near to it. He had too much taste for human meanness ; he is one of those of whom Gautier said, ‘ Some hearts are full of the sad love of ugliness ’ ; but this sad complacency itself did not lead him to exaggerate or to darken the picture too much, because he was held back by the sense of truth and the taste for truth. That suffices to make us grateful to him not only as a great painter and a great writer, but also as one of those morose and bitter moralists, just nevertheless who are—and for that reason very salutary and even necessary—something like the harsh conscience of humanity.

May 1899.

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